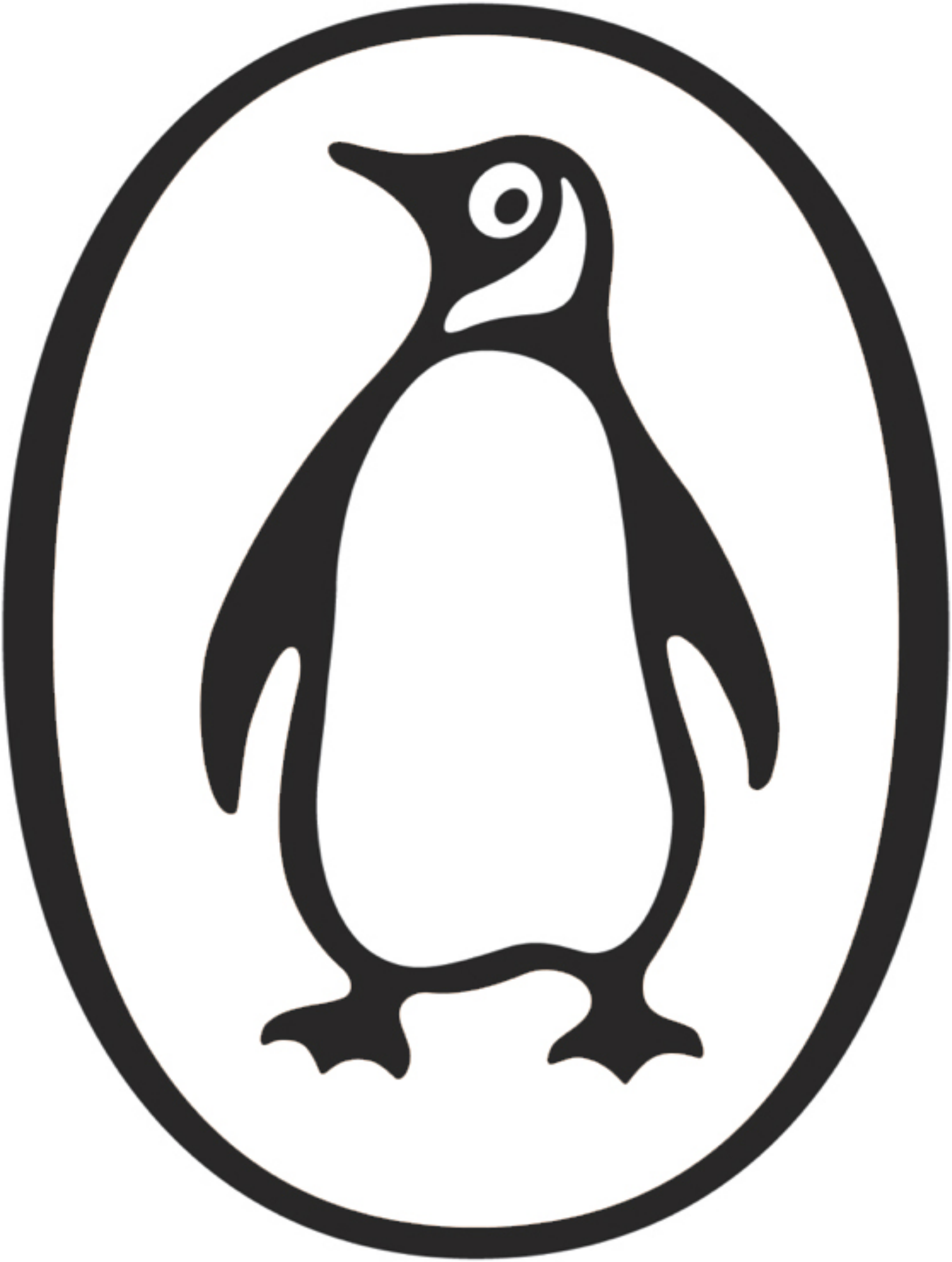


PENGUIN CLASSICS

A CONFESSION AND OTHER RELIGIOUS WRITINGS

COUNT LEO NIKOLAYEVICH TOLSTOY was born in 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana, in the Tula province, and educated privately. He studied Oriental languages and law at the University of Kazan, then led a life of pleasure until 1851 when he joined an artillery regiment in the Caucasus. He took part in the Crimean War and after the defence of Sebastopol he wrote *The Sebastopol Sketches* (1855–6), which established his reputation. After a period in St Petersburg and abroad, where he studied educational methods for use in his school for peasant children in Yasnaya Polyana, he married Sophie Andreyevna Behrs in 1862. The next fifteen years was a period of great happiness; they had thirteen children, and Tolstoy managed his vast estates in the Volga Steppes, continued his educational projects, cared for his peasants and wrote *War and Peace* (1865–8) and *Anna Karenin* (1874–6). *A Confession* (1879–82) marked an outward change in his life and works; he became an extreme rationalist and moralist, and in a series of pamphlets after 1880 he expressed theories such as rejection of the state and church, indictment of the demands of the flesh and denunciation of private property. His teaching earned him numerous followers at home and abroad, but also much opposition, and in 1901 he was excommunicated by the Russian Holy Synod. He died in 1910, in

the course of a dramatic flight from home, at the small railway station of Astapovo.

JANE KENTISH was born in 1953 and took a BA in Russian Literature in 1974 at the University of Sussex, where two years later she gained her MA in Byzantine and Russian Art and Architecture. Since then she has worked as a researcher. She is a lecturer in Byzantine and early Russian History and Art. Her translation of Dostoyevsky's *Netochka Nezvanova* has been published in the Penguin Classics, and *Notes from the Underground* and *The Gambler* by Oxford University Press.

*Leo Tolstoy*

# A CONFESSION AND OTHER RELIGIOUS WRITINGS

*Translated with an Introduction*
*by Jane Kentish*

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# INTRODUCTION

1

By the year 1879, when in his fifty-first year Tolstoy began writing his *Confession*, he had already achieved an international literary status equalled by few in their lifetime. His name was immortalized by *War and Peace* (1863–9) and *Anna Karenina* (1873–8). Not without reason, it is on these and other of his fictional works that Tolstoy's reputation rests today. This is far from what the author would have wished: early in the 1880s he repudiated the vanities of literary success, referring to *Anna Karenina* as 'an abomination that no longer exists for me'. He only regretted that there remained people for whom such works were necessary. Copyright to this and other of his works written before 1880 were renounced to his wife, Sonya. And if we look back to the time of Tolstoy's death in 1910 when, as Maxim Gorky describes, the world came to a halt, it was not simply Count Tolstoy, novelist *par excellence*, whose death was mourned, it was as much (and for many people, more) the death of Leo Nikolaevitch, spokesman for Christian humanity. Since then the proselytizing, yet often prophetic, voice of Tolstoy in his later years has been heard less and less, and an image of him as a rather quixotic, egoistic philanthropist has arisen, which does him small justice. To what extent this is due to lack of available texts, and to

what extent it is due to the evolution of a world where religious thought is all too often regarded as taboo, cannot be estimated. And it is very easy to ridicule those who preach, and try to enact, eternal Christian truths.

Tolstoy probably comes in for more than his fair share of derision because of his aristocratic heritage. As beneficiary of an enormous estate, Yasnaya Polyana (now a museum), he could achieve an income handsome enough to support his wife and ever-growing family without having to work. After his spiritual crisis at the end of the 1870s Tolstoy felt increasingly ill at ease about this estate, together with the whole way of life that went with it. His diaries, letters, writings and the records of those who knew him well and felt spiritually akin testify to the sincerity of his loathing and regret for the unprincipled manner in which his family, as well as the entire body of the élite and the rich, esteemed life: Moscow balls, luxurious surroundings, expensive clothing, social success, spicy, tasty and plentiful food and an insatiable desire for acquisitions. Since all this evidently repelled and grieved Tolstoy, why did he not relinquish it and pursue the more ascetic life he ideologically preferred in a more fitting environment? Tolstoy's failure to do so is often regarded as a failure to practise what he preached. In his defence it might be pointed out that, as he frequently reminded people, his mission was service to God among real, living people rather than monastic seclusion; moreover, he rightly did not feel free to abandon his wife and numerous children. Tolstoy came to disapprove of the colonies that sprang up

in his name, in Russia, England, Holland and America, whose members avowed to practise Christianity on earth, denouncing the authority of Church and State and following the 'Tolstoyan' way of life. He felt that these colonies were of little benefit to humanity at large, and his own preferred ideal was pursuit of a life based on moral truths in a natural environment, albeit an alien one, hoping to persuade by example.

Flight into the woods in the manner of the early desert fathers was not something Tolstoy saw as appropriate to either himself or his age. His religious understanding is based on commitment to life rather than withdrawal from it, on participation rather than passivity, on establishing the kingdom of God on earth rather than anticipating it in an after-life. As outward expressions of humility he adopted the peasant uniform, strict vegetarianism, a daily regime of long hours of physical toil, and finally a disavowal of concupiscence. Renouncing his inherited title, he became plain Leo Nikolaevitch Tolstoy; to his wife's dismay he publicly declared that all his writings post-1880 were public property and he might have done the same with his estate were it not for family opposition – instead, he abdicated his title to it in favour of his wife and children.

Apart from the example Tolstoy sought to set at home, and more importantly to history, he applied himself to the world around him, both through his personal activities and his writings, championing the peasants and proselytizing to the rich in the name of the

common weal. On behalf of the peasants, those incalculable millions who for Tolstoy, with his slavophile heritage and dedication to Christlike humility, represented something of an ideal, he set himself to numerous practical tasks including the reform of peasant schools (something he had begun in the 1860s), relief work during the great famine of 1891–2, active support for the persecuted religious sects (notably the Doukabars), and a series of moral tales written specifically for the common folk. In the prolific writings of his last thirty years Tolstoy further championed the oppressed by persuasively undermining the entire social, religious and political structure on which the lives of the well-to-do rested; his influence was enormous, both at home and abroad.

Both among his own family, and in the wider arena, Tolstoy met with scorn and impatience as well as love and respect. Although he found spiritual allegiance in some of his children, he never found it in his wife. Indeed, the records of his marital life express intense struggle and much unhappiness. Tolstoy's reputation outside the home was powerful, and from the mid-1880s onwards Yasnaya Polyana became a centre to which pilgrims flocked from all corners of the earth. The authorities of both Church and State, viewed by Tolstoy as a corruptive union of two archaic, institutional evils, became increasingly irritated and fearful of his influence. With the exception of a few censored editions of works such as *Resurrection* and *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, nothing that Tolstoy wrote in the latter part of his life passed the censor. They were, however, widely read in manuscript and hectographed form, as well as in

editions published abroad and circulated in Russia. Possession of his banned writings, or any other show of allegiance to what the government referred to as 'Tolstoy's abominations', became a punishable offence for which a great many of his followers suffered. For fear of the international sensation that would only serve their opponent's cause, the government dared not risk silencing him by imprisonment. Tolstoy frequently regretted this, yearning for the damp dungeon which he imagined would be preferable to his comfortable home, and offended that he was not permitted to share the suffering he felt responsible for causing in others. This was the premise of most of the government's measures against him: wounding him through his followers and avoiding a political scandal that might lend him credibility. For the last twenty-five years of his life the self-renounced Count was kept under constant police surveillance, which seems hardly necessary since he spent most of his time on a remote estate in the middle of Russia and was outrightly opposed to any form of violent revolutionary activity.

There was one, not inconsiderable, exception to this official attitude of mild harassment. This was Tolstoy's excommunication in 1901. By this time the authorities in Russia, where the Church was merely the arm of the State, had lost patience with Tolstoy's criticism and refutation of their powers. As a contemporary figure put it, there were then in Russia two powers, Nicholas II and Leo Tolstoy, and the latter was waging public war against the entire political and religious order. No doubt with government sanction

the Church tried to silence him, intending to deflate his public esteem by excommunicating him. But they were wrong in assuming that the public would not question the expediences of the Church in spiritual matters, and their intention of damning Tolstoy fell flat; a tremendous sensation ensued and the already discontented populace saw in this act yet another example of political oppression.

The commanding influence Tolstoy held over a substantial section of the Russian people fell somewhat into decline after the bloody events of 1905. The upsurge of violence at this time clouded his spell, as many 'Tolstoyans' gave up the idea of countering bayonets and bullets with passive, non-violent resistance and joined the ranks of the revolutionaries. Tolstoy, the pacifist, was overtaken by a wave of history: while he preached progress through a gradual evolution of moral self-perfection, men, women and children were being slaughtered on the streets of Russia. Both the radicals and the liberals, enraged by what they regarded as Tolstoy's archaic stand at a time of intense revolutionary crisis, spouted embittered irritation at the man who had, nonetheless, more effectively than any other leader of the time, exposed the evils of the government, the Church, and capitalism and unwittingly prepared the way for the violent upheavals of the future. Lenin himself acknowledged the great debt of the Russian revolution to Tolstoy's writings, even crediting him with responsibility for the failure of the first revolutionary campaign of

1905: ‘The Tolstoyan non-resistance to evil [was] the most serious cause of the defeat of the first revolutionary campaign.’

It is often commented that while having a profound understanding of the peasant population Tolstoy did not understand the urban middle classes, who were to forge the revolution of 1917. This is undoubtedly true: Tolstoy’s life brought him into little contact with urban life and the new ideas that occupied men’s minds. But his business was not with revolutions and he cared little for political ideas *per se*, let alone those based on populations divided into economic forces. Despite his removal from the political scenario (like most sages he was beyond it), Tolstoy was proved remarkably accurate in many of his predictions. For years before the events of 1905 he had been warning the Tsar against the unprecedented bloodshed that would ensue if he failed to make vital social reforms. In letters and petitions to Nicholas II he listed the people’s grievances and begged him to bring an end to autocratic rule. In 1901 Tolstoy wrote to Boulanger: ‘Every thinking person of our time cannot fail to see that there are only two ways out of the oppressive and menacing situation with which we are now confronted: one, though very difficult, is bloody revolution; the second is for the governments to recognize their obligations not to oppose the law of progress, not to offend the old or, as we have done, return to the past, but rather to understand the direction in which humanity is moving and to lead the people in that direction.’ One of the major slogans under which the 1917 revolution was fought, ‘Land to the

Peasants', was something Tolstoy had been warning about since the beginning of the century when, realizing that land hunger would drive the peasants to kill the landowners (and by 1905 was doing so), he advocated the practical remedy of prohibiting private ownership of land.

But if Tolstoy believed in a withering away of the state it was not to be accomplished through any Marxist philosophy based on economic causes, but rather through the ideas he expresses in his own writings: the evolution of man's consciousness so that the universal truths are gradually revealed to him, accepted by him, and enacted by him. Tolstoy could not agree that ends justify means, and he knew very well that a violent revolutionary change would merely lead to an exchange in the form of tyranny and as such be self-defeating. He was aware that exploitation, brutality and injustice perpetrated in the name of an ideology in no way differs from the same evils performed under Tsars and capitalists. Had he lived he would probably have seen little difference between the morality of the rule of the Kremlin and that of the Tsars, or between the godless state of the Soviets and the falsified Christianity that prevailed in his own day.

## 2

Among the prolific moral, religious and didactic works he wrote between 1880 and his death in 1910, the four works collected here are illustrative of what Tolstoy, in the latter part of his life, came to understand as the overall meaning and purpose of life: the

answer to his searches for the truth. These works – *A Confession* (1879), *Religion and Morality* (1893), *What is Religion and of What Does Its Essence Consist?* (1902) and *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* (1908) – are based on the author's investigations and perusals in the realm of metaphysics, ethics and religion as he struggled to reach a synoptic view of life, acceptable to the demands of his reason, and to apply this comprehension to practical living. As a body of thought these, as well as all the writings of this period of Tolstoy's life, are unique in that they belong to no recognizable school of philosophical thought. Even if there had been a strong tradition of philosophy in nineteenth-century Russia it is unlikely that this would have altered Tolstoy's anarchic attitude to established schools of thought; like his temperament, his ideas were always highly individual and independent.

Although Tolstoy's *Confession* marks the apotheosis of a religious struggle that had emerged in earnest during the 1870s, and a watershed in both his personal and his literary career, the ideas he thereafter expounded were by no means unprecedented: the germs of all of them are deeply imbedded in his earlier works, where moral and religious questioning and a yearning for the truth are essential constituents. As a small child Tolstoy had been enraptured by his brother Nikolai's claim to possess the key to a Golden Age where there would be no more misery and disease and where everyone would be happy, and in his old age, still remembering this Utopia, Tolstoy asked to be buried at the spot

where this secret was supposed to be hidden. As a youth his strongest belief was in self-perfection, physical, intellectual and moral. In reality he seems to have cultivated only the first two of these ideals, with his love of physical activities and his extensive reading. His diaries while serving in the Caucasus are filled with expressions of the horror he came to feel at the spectacle of war, probably the origin of many of his religious and pacifist ideas. During the Sevastopol campaign the young Tolstoy, who was then serving as a cadet, describes in his diary the conception of 'a stupendous idea, to the realization of which I feel capable of dedicating my whole life. The idea is the founding of a new religion corresponding to the present development of mankind: the religion of Christ purged of dogmas and mysticism – a practical religion not promising future bliss but giving bliss on earth.' Tolstoy was later to dedicate his life to just this cause. After the Crimean campaign he resigned from the army, utterly disillusioned with what he saw as the futile waste of human life. *Lucerne,* written in 1857, demonstrates his condemnation of materialism and the doctrine of progress, currently fashionable in the West. More vividly than anything else, the central characters of Tolstoy's great novels, namely Pierre, Prince Andrew, Princess Mary and Levin, all embody the author's concern with the important questions of God, immortality, freedom and morality.

In one way or another Tolstoy had been seeking a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of life (whether it be called God, the truth, or happiness) since his earliest years. But it

was not until the 1870s that he felt compelled to dedicate his life and intellect wholly to this affair. Before and while writing *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy increasingly turned his attention to religion as the deepest expression of man's purpose. In 1873 he wrote to the poet Fet that although he found religion illogical, 'there is yet something in it'. Tolstoy's journey to religious acceptance was deeply marked by his intellectual struggle against this illogicality, for he found difficulty in trusting in something that ran counter to his reason. As described in his *Confession,* Tolstoy spent much of the 1870s studying and perusing other major religions – the philosophical and religious works of major thinkers from the Classicists to Schopenhauer and Hegel – as well as the way of life of both those from his own class and those belonging to the ordinary masses, in search of the key to an understanding of the riddle of existence, but he found nothing his reason did not reject. In 1878 his wife wrote: 'Today he says he cannot live for long in this terrible religious struggle in which he has been buried for the last two years, and now he hopes that he is close to the time when he may become an entirely religious man.' This most probably meant the completion of *Anna Karenina*, which Tolstoy found increasingly difficult to write because of his spiritual preoccupations, to which he gave some expression in the character of Levin. The period following the completion of this great novel was one of intense meditation and spiritual conflict, with some solace found in a religious retreat made to Kaluga, and a reading of Pascal's *Pensées*. Between 1877 and 1878 Tolstoy wrote two articles in which he

presents the arguments of faith, ‘A Debate on Faith in the Kremlin’, and ‘The Interlocutors’. And in 1879 he wrote his compelling biography of the soul, *A Confession*, which certainly ranks amongst the finest biographies of its sort.

Having found no satisfactory answer in existing knowledge, contemporary religion or the lives of those around him to the riddle that had brought him to the verge of suicide – namely ‘What meaning has my life that the inevitability of death does not destroy?’ – and having realized that he could not accept faith and religious doctrine on trust, Tolstoy ends his *Confession* on an affirmative note. His intuition indicates to him that there is an answer to the overall meaning of life, possibly a God, that fulfils the desire to believe, while reason, always the yardstick of Tolstoy’s metaphysical inquiries, indicates that the practical solution to the riddle of life lies in Christ’s teaching stripped bare of the centuries of irrelevant church dogma and mystery which had rendered it meaningless. In the end he was to fulfil the ‘stupendous idea’ of 1855.

Over the next few years Tolstoy made a deep examination of Christian teaching in its original form, in order to find what he felt was the essence of Christ’s message to humanity. This resulted in his repudiation of the Church, together with the body of dogma it embraced. *What is Religion and of What Does Its Essence Consist?* presents some of the conclusions, reached in a more gentle and persuasive manner than earlier and more vehement expressions.

Through a historical analysis Tolstoy describes what he sees as the Church's distortion of the truth in the Christian teaching, and finally defines true religion as 'a relationship established with God, in conformity with reason and contemporary knowledge, and which alone pushes humanity forwards to its destined aim'. Parallels are drawn with other major religions in order to illustrate that the essence of religion is common to them all, i.e. the establishing of the above-mentioned relationship, which is like that of a part to a whole. Tolstoy suggests that from this relationship follows man's purpose – to increase his spiritual qualities – which in turn leads to the practical rules of the law of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, or 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Tolstoy describes faith as a state of the soul conducive to certain behaviour, rather than the fulfilment of meaningless ceremonies and repetition of certain words, as taught by the false teachings of Church Christianity.

It is typical of Tolstoy that in his discourses on true religion reason is given place of honour, for he believed it to be the power man has to define his relationship to the universe, and claims that 'complete unity with the highest and most perfect reason, and thereby perfect well-being, is an ideal towards which humanity strives'. Rather less concerned than other theological writers with the nature of God, and well aware that his existence cannot be proven, Tolstoy strove to provide an explanation of the meaning of life as a perception of the infinite reconciled to the finite: a synoptic view of life, acceptable to the demands of reason and to

the level of knowledge and understanding of contemporary man. In *Religion and Morality,* written in reply to questions put to him by a German ethical cultural society, Tolstoy emphasizes the evolutionary nature of religion (probably stemming from his youthful interest in the European doctrine of natural law) as a 'manifestation of infinite reason which is gradually revealing itself to mankind', together with morality which continually 'grows and unfolds'.

Always concerned with the realization of the kingdom of God on earth, Tolstoy sought the simple, pragmatic truths in Christ's teaching, which, he believed, alone provided the key to achieving this end. He found the solution to much that was unclear to him in the gospels, in the passage in St Matthew: 'You have heard it said an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth: but I say to you, resist not him that is evil.' The doctrine of love and universal brotherhood became the cornerstone of Tolstoy's religious ideology, just as it was of Christ's. *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* gives potent literary expression to this teaching of non-resistance to evil and its practical consequences. The 1905 revolution, the ever-increasing social disharmony and conflict within Russian society and the imminence of international war doubtless stirred Tolstoy to give more and more of his energy to the issue of non-violent resistance or pacifism. Opposed to any change achieved by violent means, Tolstoy believed that 'the dreadful weight of evil that hangs over the people of the world and oppresses them' was the result of a lack of religious understanding and could only be amended by a

change in man's religious consciousness. Against a historical survey Tolstoy shows how Christ's teaching had been perverted by the authorities of Church and State to justify the use of violence in order to uphold their own institutions, themselves based on coercion, and thus incompatible with true Christianity. Tolstoy, with his love of truth, believed that in order for humanity to progress along the path of moral development it must shed its trust in the false teachings of Church and State and, instead, follow Christ's teaching of the supreme law of love and the consequent denial of violence. Like Marxism, the logical conclusion to Tolstoy's body of thought is a classless, stateless society, and as such they are both true products of nineteenth-century liberal thought. But Tolstoy's views and his diagnosis and remedy for the world present almost the opposite side of the Marxist coin. Tolstoy's approach is spiritual, anti-materialist, based on universal truths of love, non-violence and moral perfection, and he believed that there is an eternal and absolute to which the temporal and relative are subject to judgement.

Tolstoy's most lasting influence was in India. He and M. K. Gandhi had begun a correspondence in the early years of the twentieth century, with Gandhi referring to himself as Tolstoy's 'humble follower'. Many of their beliefs have close affinities – the doctrine of non-violence, for example, and the belief that the kingdom of God exists within man. Gandhi's campaign of civil disobedience and passive resistance, together with his abhorrence of Western 'progress', owe much to Tolstoy, although his

engagements in the political arena do not. And it is in the East, particularly India, where the liberal democratic tradition continued longer, that Tolstoy's ideas remained alive.

# A CONFESSION

## CHAPTER 1

I was baptized and brought up in the Orthodox Christian faith. I was instructed in it both as a child and throughout my boyhood and youth. But when at the age of eighteen I left university in my second year, I no longer believed in any of the things I had been taught.

Judging from various memories, I had never believed very seriously but had merely trusted in what I was taught and in what was professed by my elders; but this trust was very unstable.

I remember when I was eleven years old a high school boy named Volodya, now long since dead, came to see us one Sunday and announced the latest discovery made at school. The discovery was that there is no God and that everything we were being taught was pure invention (this was in 1838). I remember my older brothers taking a great interest in this news and even allowing me to join in the discussion. We all, I remember, became very excited and took the news as something very enthralling and entirely possible.

I remember too that when my older brother Dmitri, who was then at university, suddenly and with characteristic fervour embraced the faith and started to attend all the services, to observe the fasts and to lead a pure and moral life we all, including the

older ones, constantly made fun of him and for some reason nicknamed him Noah. And I remember when Mushkin-Pushkin, at the time a curator at the University of Kazan, invited us to a ball and jokingly persuaded my brother, who had declined the invitation, that even David danced before the ark. At the time I used to enjoy these jokes of my elders, and from them I drew the conclusion that it is necessary to learn the Catechism and it is necessary to go to church, but that one need not take it all too seriously. I also recall reading Voltaire when I was very young; I not only failed to be shocked by his humour but even found it quite amusing.

The decline of my faith occurred in the way in which it has always happened, and still happens, among those from our kind of background. It seems to me that in the majority of instances it happens like this: people live as everyone lives, but on the basis of principles that not only have nothing in common with religious doctrines but are, on the whole, contrary to them; religious doctrine plays no part in life, or in relations between people, neither are we confronted with it in our personal lives. Religious doctrine is professed in some other realm, at a distance from life and independent of it. If we encounter it, it is only as an external phenomenon, disconnected from life.

Now, just as then, it is impossible to judge from a person's life, or behaviour, whether or not he is a believer. If there is a difference between those who openly profess Orthodoxy and those

who deny it, then it is not to the advantage of the former. Nowadays, as before, the public declaration and confession of Orthodoxy is usually encountered among dull-witted, cruel and immoral people who tend to consider themselves very important. Whereas intelligence, honesty, straight forwardness, good-naturedness and morality are qualities usually found among people who claim to be non-believers. The Catechism is taught in schools and the pupils are sent to church; officials must be able to produce evidence of having received communion. But a person belonging to our circle, who is no longer at school and has not entered into public service, can still live for ten years or more without once remembering that he is living among Christians and is himself considered to be a practising member of the Orthodox Church. This was even more true in the past.

Thus today, just as in earlier times, religious teaching, which is accepted on trust and sustained by external pressure, gradually weakens under the influence of knowledge and experience of life that stands in opposition to the religious doctrines; a person can go on living for a long time imagining that the body of religious instruction imparted to him when he was a child is still there, whereas it has in fact disappeared without leaving a trace.

An intelligent and honest man by the name of S. told me the story of how he lost his faith. At the age of twenty-six, while resting overnight on a hunting expedition, he followed an old childhood custom of kneeling down to pray in the evening. His

elder brother, who was with him on the expedition, lay on some straw watching him. When S. had finished and was preparing to lie down his brother said to him: 'Do you still do that?' Nothing more was said between them. But from that day on S. stopped saying his prayers and going to church. And for thirty years he has not prayed, has not received communion and has not gone to church. And this is not because he knew his brother's convictions and wanted to share them, nor was it because he had resolved something in his heart, but simply because this comment of his brother's was like a finger being pushed against a wall that was on the verge of collapsing from its own weight. These words indicated that the place where he had thought faith to be had long been empty and that the words he spoke, the signs of the cross and genuflections he made in prayer, were essentially meaningless actions. Having recognized their meaninglessness he could no longer continue doing them.

Thus it has happened and still happens, I believe, with the great majority of people. I am speaking about people from our type of background, of people who are sincere with themselves, and not of those who use the profession of faith as a means of obtaining some kind of worldly aims. (These people are the most fundamental non-believers, for if faith is seen by them as a means of achieving various worldly aims, then it is certainly no longer faith.) People of our upbringing find themselves in a situation where the light of knowledge and of life have melted away an artificial edifice, and

they have either failed to notice this and swept it away completely, or have simply failed to notice it as yet.

The religious instruction communicated to me since childhood faded, as it does with others, only with the difference that since I had begun to read and think a great deal while still very young, my abdication of religious faith occurred very early. When I was sixteen I ceased saying my prayers, going to church or fasting of my own accord. I no longer believed in what I had been taught as a child; but I did believe in something, without being able to say what it was. I believed in God, or rather I did not deny God, but what kind of God I could not have said; neither did I reject Christ or his teachings, but what I understood by the teachings again I could not have said.

Now, looking back at that time, I can clearly see that the only real faith I had, apart from the animal instincts motivating my life, was a belief in perfection. But what this perfection consisted of, and what its aim was, were unclear to me. I tried to perfect myself intellectually and studied everything I came upon in life. I tried to perfect my will, setting myself rules I tried to follow. I perfected myself physically, practising all kinds of exercises in order to develop my strength and dexterity, and I cultivated endurance and patience by undergoing all kinds of hardship. All this I regarded as perfection. The beginning of it all was, of course, moral perfection, but this was soon replaced by a belief in general perfection, that is a desire to be better not in my own eyes or before God but in the

eyes of other people. And very soon this determination to be better than others became a wish to be more powerful than others: more famous, more important, wealthier.

## CHAPTER 2

Some day I will relate the story of my life, and of how touching and instructive were those ten years of my youth. I think a great many people must have experienced something similar. I longed with all my soul to be good, but I was young; I had passions and I was alone, completely alone in my search for goodness. Every time I tried to display my innermost desires – a wish to be morally good – I met with contempt and scorn, and as soon as I gave in to base desires I was praised and encouraged. Ambition, lust for power, self-interest, lechery, pride, anger, revenge, were all respected qualities. As I yielded to these passions I became like my elders and I felt that they were pleased with me. A dear old aunt of mine, the purest of creatures, with whom I lived, was always saying that she wished for nothing as much as that I would have a relationship with a married woman. '*Rien ne forme un jeune homme comme une liaison avec une femme comme il faut.*'[1] Another happiness she wished for me was that I should become an adjutant, and preferably to the Emperor. And the greatest happiness of all would be for me to marry a very rich girl and acquire as many serfs as possible through the marriage.

I cannot recall those years without horror, loathing, and heartache. I killed people in war, summoned others to duels in order to kill them, gambled at cards; I devoured the fruits of the peasant's labour and punished them; I fornicated and practised deceit. Lying, thieving, promiscuity of all kinds, drunkenness,

violence, murder… there was not a crime I did not commit, and yet I was praised for it all and my contemporaries considered, and still consider me, a relatively moral man.

For ten years I lived in this fashion.

During this time I began to write out of vanity, self-interest and pride. In my writings I did the same as I did in life. In order to achieve the fame and money for which I wrote I had to conceal what was good in myself and display what was bad. And this is what I did. Time and again I would contrive in my writings to conceal under the guise of indifference, or even of light-heartedness, those strivings for goodness which lent meaning to my life. And I succeeded and was praised.

After the war,[2] by which time I was twenty-six, I returned to St Petersburg and took up company with writers. They accepted me as one of them and flattered me. I had no time to stop and look around before I had assimilated the view of life held by the group of writers with whom I mixed, and before long all my earlier attempts at improvement had been erased. Their outlook provided a theory that justified my undisciplined life.

The view of life adopted by these people, my literary associates, was that generally speaking life is a process of development in the course of which the most important role is played by us, the thinkers; and that among the thinkers it is we, the artists and poets, who have the most influence. Our vocation is to educate people. In order to avoid being confronted by the obvious question

– ‘What do I know and what have I got to teach?’ – their theory explained that it is not necessary to know this and that the poet and the artist teach unconsciously. I was considered a superb artist and poet and it was therefore quite natural for me to adopt this theory. I, an artist and poet, wrote without knowing myself what it was I was teaching. And I was paid money for doing this. I was provided with excellent food, lodgings, women, company, and I was famous. It must then be the case that what I was teaching was very good.

This faith in the meaning of poetry and in the evolution of life was a religion and I was one of its priests. It was very profitable and pleasant to be one of its priests, and for a considerable length of time I lived in this faith without ever doubting its validity. But in the second, and still more in the third year of this existence, I began to doubt its infallibility and to examine it. The first point of doubt was that I had begun to notice how the priests of this religion disagreed among themselves. Some said: ‘We are the finest and most useful teachers and it is we who teach what is needed, while the others teach falsely.’ And others said: ‘No! We are the real teachers and you teach falsely!’ They argued, quarrelled, deceived and tricked one another. Moreover, there were many among us who were unconcerned as to who was right and who wrong, but who simply achieved their own selfish ends by means of this activity of ours. All this forced me to doubt the truth of the faith.

Furthermore, once I had begun to doubt the truth of this writer's religion I started observing its priests more closely and became convinced that almost all the priests of this faith – the writers – were immoral men, the majority of bad and worthless character and much inferior to the people I had met during my former dissipated military life. But they were complacent and self-satisfied in a way that is only possible for people who are truly holy, or for those who do not know what holiness is. These people became repugnant to me, and I became repugnant to myself, and realized that the religion was a fraud.

But strange to say, even though the utter falsehood of this creed was something I came quickly to understand and to reject, I did not discard the rank these people bestowed on me: that of artist, poet and teacher. I naïvely imagined that I was a poet and an artist, and could teach everybody without myself knowing what I was teaching. And this is what I did.

Through my association with these men I acquired a new vice: an unhealthily developed pride, and an insane conviction that it was my vocation to teach people without knowing what I was teaching.

Now, when I think about this period and about my state of mind and that of those around me (and incidentally there are thousands of them nowadays), I feel sad, terrible, ridiculous; it arouses in me precisely the same feelings as one might experience in a madhouse.

At the time we were all convinced that we must talk and talk and write and publish as quickly as possible, and as much as possible, and that this was all necessary for the good of mankind. And thousands of us, contradicting and abusing one another, published and wrote with the aim of teaching others. Failing to notice that we knew nothing, that we did not know the answer to the most basic question of life – what is good and what is evil – we all spoke at the same time, never listening to one another. At times we indulged and praised each other in order to be indulged and praised in return, at other times we grew angry and shrieked at each other, just as if we were in a madhouse.

Thousands of workers toiled day and night, assembling millions and millions of words, which were distributed by post over the whole of Russia; and we taught and taught, but never managed to impart all that we had to teach, and were always annoyed that we were given so little attention.

Horribly strange, but I now understand it all. Our genuine, sincere concern was over how to gain as much money and fame as possible. And the only thing we knew how to do in order to achieve this aim was to write books and journals. This is what we did. But in order for us to pursue this utterly useless task and have the assurance that we were very important people we needed an argument that would justify what we were doing. And so we devised the following; everything that exists is rational and all that exists evolves. And it evolves through enlightenment.

Enlightenment is measured through the distribution of books and journals. We are paid and respected for writing these books and papers, so we must be the most important and useful people. This theory would have been all very well had we been in agreement; but since any thought expressed by any one of us was always contradicted by the diametrically opposed views of another, we should have been forced to rethink. But we did not notice this; we were paid money and those who sided with us praised us, consequently everyone of us believed himself to be in the right.

It is now clear to me that there was no difference between our behaviour and that of people in a madhouse; but at the time I only dimly suspected this and, like all madmen, I thought everyone was mad except myself.

## CHAPTER 3

And so I lived, abandoning myself to this madness, for another six years until I married.[3] During this period I went abroad. Life in Europe and the contact I had with advanced and learned Europeans still further reinforced the belief in overall perfection, by which I lived; for I found the same belief among them. With my own self this belief assumed the form it usually takes among the educated men of our time. The belief was expressed in the word 'progress'. At the time I felt that this word had some meaning. Living as I was then, like any individual I was tormented by the problem of how to live a better life. I did not yet understand that in answering 'live in conformity with progress', I was speaking exactly like a person who is in a boat being carried along by wind and waves and who when asked the most important and vital question, 'Where should I steer?' avoids answering by saying, 'We are being carried somewhere.'

At the time I noticed none of this. Only occasionally, led more by instinct than reason, I rebelled against the superstition so prevalent in our age by which people shield themselves from their failure to understand life. Thus, during my stay in Paris, the sight of an execution revealed to me the precariousness of my superstition in progress. When I saw the heads being separated from the bodies and heard them thump, one after the next, into the box I understood, and not just with my intellect but with my whole being, that no theories of the rationality of existence and progress

could justify this crime. I realized that even if every single person since the day of creation had, according to whatever theory, found this necessary I knew that it was unnecessary and wrong, and therefore that judgements on what is good and necessary must not be based on what other people say and do, or on progress, but on the instincts of my own soul. Another instance in which I felt that the superstition of progress was inadequate in regard to life was the death of my brother.[4] He was an intelligent, kind-hearted, serious man who became ill when he was young, suffered for over a year and died in torment without having understood why he had lived, and still less why he was dying. No theories could provide the answers to these questions, either for him or for me, during his slow and tortuous death.

But these were only rare instances of doubt and in truth I continued to live, professing faith only in progress. 'Everything is evolving and I am evolving; and the reason why I am evolving together with all the rest will one day be known to me.' This is how I would have formulated my belief at the time.

When I returned from abroad I settled in the country and busied myself with the running of the peasant schools.[5] This occupation was close to my heart because in it was none of the falsehood that had become so apparent to me, and struck me so forcibly when I was a literary teacher. Here too I was acting in the name of progress, but I had already assumed a critical attitude towards this progress. I told myself that in some of its manifestations progress

had proceeded incorrectly and that here, when dealing with the primitive peasant children, it was necessary to act in a spirit of freedom, leaving them to choose whatever path to progress they wished to take.

In reality I was still confronted with the same insoluble problem of how to teach without knowing what I was teaching. In the higher circles of literary activity it was apparent to me that I could not teach without knowing what it was I taught, for I saw that everyone taught differently and that in our arguments we only concealed our own lack of knowledge from each other. But here with the peasant children I thought I could avoid this difficulty by allowing the children to study whatever they liked. It amused me to recall how I side-tracked in order to fulfil my ambition of teaching, while knowing very well in the depths of my heart that I could not possibly teach what was needed because I did not know what it was. After a year spent occupied with the affairs of the school I went abroad again in order to discover how to teach others what I did not know myself.

I thought I learnt this there, and equipped with all this wisdom I returned to Russia in the year of the Emancipation of the Serfs.[6] I took up the position of arbitrator and started teaching the uneducated people in the schools, as well as the educated people through the journal I had begun publishing. This seemed to be going well but I felt that my mental state was not altogether healthy and that this could not continue for long. I might perhaps

have fallen at this time into the same despair that I fell into when I was fifty if there had not been one aspect of life I had not yet experienced and which promised salvation: this was family life.

For a year I involved myself with arbitration work, with the schools and the journal, and soon exhausted myself. This was largely due to my confusion; the struggle as arbitrator became so burdensome, my school activities so complex and my journalistic prevarications so repulsive to me, since they always consisted of the same thing: the desire to teach everyone while concealing the fact that I did not know what I was teaching. I became ill, spiritually more than physically. I threw in everything and left for the steppes of the Bashkirs[7] to breathe fresh air, drink koumiss[8] and live a primitive life.

On my return I married. The new circumstances of happy family life completely distracted me from any search for the overall meaning of life. At the time my whole life was bound up with my family, my wife and my children and thus in concerns for improving our means of living. My striving for self-perfection, which had already been replaced by a striving for perfection in general, that is for progress, was now sublimated beneath the straightforward desire of achieving the best for my family and myself.

Thus another fifteen years passed.

Despite the fact that during those fifteen years I considered the writer's task unimportant, I continued to write. I had already

tasted the temptations of authorship, the temptations of enormous financial gain and applause for my trivial work, and I devoted myself to it as a means of improving my material position and of stifling any questions in my soul regarding the meaning of my own life, or of life in general.

I wrote, teaching what was for me the only truth: that we must live in order to give ourselves and our families the best possible in life.

And so I lived until five years ago when something very strange started happening to me. At first I began experiencing moments of bewilderment; my life would come to a standstill, as if I did not know how to live or what to do, and I felt lost and fell into despair. But they passed and I continued to live as before. Then these moments of bewilderment started to recur more frequently, always taking the same form. On these occasions, when life came to a standstill, the same questions always arose: 'Why? What comes next?'

At first I thought the questions pointless and irrelevant. I felt the answers were well known and that should I wish to resolve them it would not cost me much effort; that for the time being I did not have the time to work it all out, but that when I put my mind to it I would find all the answers. However, the questions repeated themselves over and again, demanding answers with more and more urgency. They fell like full stops, always on the same spot, uniting in one large black spot.

And then, what happens to everyone stricken with a fatal inner disease happened to me. At first minor signs of indisposition appear, which the sick person ignores; then these symptoms appear more and more frequently, merging into one interrupted period of suffering. The suffering increases and before the sick man realizes what is happening he discovers that the thing he had taken for an indisposition is in fact the thing that is more important to him than anything in the world: it is death.

This is just what happened to me. I realized that it was not just a casual indisposition but something very serious and that if the same questions kept repeating themselves they would have to be answered. And I tried to answer them. The questions seemed so stupid, simple, and childish. But the moment I touched upon them and tried to resolve them I was immediately convinced, firstly, that they were not childish and stupid questions but were the most important and profound questions in life, and secondly, that however much I thought about them I could not resolve them. Before occupying myself with my Samara estate, with the education of my son, or with the writing of books, I had to know why I was doing these things. While I did not know why, I could not do anything. Amidst my thoughts concerning the farm, which at the time kept me very busy, a question would suddenly come into my head: 'Well fine, so you will have 6,000 desyatins[9] in the Samara province and 300 horses, and then what?' And feeling completely taken aback, I would not know what to think next. Or, beginning to reflect on the education of my children, I would ask

myself, ‘Why?’ Or deliberating on how the peasants might achieve prosperity I would suddenly ask myself, ‘What concern is it of mine?’ Or thinking about the fame my own writing brought me, I would say to myself, ‘Well fine, so you will be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Molière, more famous than all the writers in the world, and so what?’

And I had absolutely no answer.

## CHAPTER 4

My life came to a standstill. I could breathe, eat, drink and sleep and I could not help breathing, eating, drinking and sleeping; but there was no life in me because I had no desires whose gratification I would have deemed it reasonable to fulfil. If I wanted something I knew in advance that whether or not I satisfied my desire nothing would come of it.

If a magician had come and offered to grant my wishes I would not have known what to say. If in my intoxicated moments I still had the habit of desire, rather than real desire, in my sober moments I knew that it was a delusion and that I wanted nothing. I did not even wish to know the truth because I had guessed what it was. The truth was that life is meaningless.

It was as if I had carried on living and walking until I reached a precipice from which I could see clearly that there was nothing ahead of me other than destruction. But it was impossible to stop, and impossible to turn back or close my eyes in order not to see that there was nothing ahead other than deception of life and of happiness, and the reality of suffering and death: of complete annihilation.

Life had grown hateful to me, and some insuperable force was leading me to seek deliverance from it by whatever means. I could not say that I wanted to kill myself. The force beckoning me away from life was a more powerful, complete and overall desire. It was a force similar to my striving after life, only it was going in the

other direction. I fought as hard as I could against life. The thought of suicide now came to me as naturally as thoughts of improving my life had previously come to me. This idea was so attractive to me that I had to use cunning against myself in order to avoid carrying it out too hastily. I did not want to rush, simply because I wanted to make every effort to unravel the matter. I told myself that if I could not unravel the matter now, I still had time to do so. And it was at this time that I, a fortunate man, removed a rope from my room where I undressed every night alone, lest I hang myself from the beam between the cupboards; and I gave up taking a rifle with me on hunting trips so as not to be tempted to end my life in such an all too easy fashion. I myself did not know what I wanted. I was afraid of life and strove against it, yet I still hoped for something from it.

All this was happening to me at a time when I was surrounded on all sides by what is considered complete happiness: I was not yet fifty, I had a kind, loving and beloved wife, lovely children, and a large estate that was growing and expanding with no effort on my part. I was respected by relatives and friends far more than ever before. I was praised by strangers and could consider myself a celebrity without deceiving myself. Moreover I was not unhealthy in mind or body, but on the contrary enjoyed a strength of mind and body such as I had rarely witnessed in my contemporaries. Physically I could keep up with the peasants tilling the fields; mentally I could work for eight or ten hours at a stretch without suffering any ill effects from the effort. And in these circumstances

I found myself at the point where I could no longer go on living and, since I feared death, I had to deceive myself in order to refrain from suicide.

This spiritual condition presented itself to me in the following manner: my life is some kind of stupid and evil joke that someone is playing on me. Despite the fact that I did not acknowledge any such 'someone', who might have created me, this concept of there being someone playing a stupid and evil joke on me by bringing me into the world came to me as the most natural way of expressing my condition.

I could not help feeling that out there somewhere somebody was amusing himself by looking at me and the way I had lived for thirty or forty years, studying, developing, maturing in mind and body. And how now, with a fully matured intellect, having reached the precipice from which life reveals itself, I stood there like an utter fool, believing so firmly that there is nothing in life, that there never has been, nor ever will be. 'And he laughs…'

But whether or not this someone laughing at me really existed did not make it any easier for me. I could not attribute any rational meaning to a single act, let alone to my whole life. I simply felt astonished that I had failed to realize this from the beginning. It had all been common knowledge for such a long time. Today or tomorrow sickness and death will come (and they had already arrived) to those dear to me, and to myself, and nothing will remain other than the stench and the worms. Sooner

or later my deeds, whatever they may have been, will be forgotten and will no longer exist. What is all the fuss about then? How can a person carry on living and fail to perceive this? That is what is so astonishing! It is only possible to go on living while you are intoxicated with life; once sober it is impossible not to see that it is all a mere trick, and a stupid trick! That is exactly what it is: there is nothing either witty or amusing, it is only cruel and stupid.

There is an old Eastern fable about a traveller who is taken unawares on the steppes by a ferocious wild animal. In order to escape the beast the traveller hides in an empty well, but at the bottom of the well he sees a dragon with its jaws open, ready to devour him. The poor fellow does not dare to climb out because he is afraid of being eaten by the rapacious beast, neither does he dare drop to the bottom of the well for fear of being eaten by the dragon. So he seizes hold of a branch of a bush that is growing in the crevices of the well and clings on to it. His arms grow weak and he knows that he will soon have to resign himself to the death that awaits him on either side. Yet he still clings on, and while he is holding on to the branch he looks around and sees that two mice, one black and one white, are steadily working their way round the bush he is hanging from, gnawing away at it. Sooner or later they will eat through it and the branch will snap, and he will fall into the jaws of the dragon. The traveller sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish. But while he is still hanging there he sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the bush, stretches out his tongue and licks them. In the same way I am clinging to the

tree of life, knowing full well that the dragon of death inevitably awaits me, ready to tear me to pieces, and I cannot understand how I have fallen into this torment. And I try licking the honey that once consoled me, but it no longer gives me pleasure. The white mouse and the black mouse – day and night – are gnawing at the branch from which I am hanging. I can see the dragon clearly and the honey no longer tastes sweet. I can see only one thing; the inescapable dragon and the mice, and I cannot tear my eyes away from them. And this is no fable but the truth, the truth that is irrefutable and intelligible to everyone.

The delusion of the joys of life that had formerly stifled my fear of the dragon no longer deceived me. No matter how many times I am told: you cannot understand the meaning of life, do not think about it but live, I cannot do so because I have already done it for too long. Now I cannot help seeing day and night chasing me and leading me to my death. This is all I can see because it is the only truth. All the rest is a lie.

Those two drops of honey, which more than all else had diverted my eyes from the cruel truth, my love for my family and for my writing, which I called art – I no longer found sweet.

'The family…,' I said to myself. But my family, my wife and children, are also human beings. They are in exactly the same position as I am: they too must either live a lie, or face the terrible truth. What do they live for? Why do I love them and look after them, bring them up and watch over them? In order to reach the

same state of despair that fills me, or in order to be dull-witted! If I love them I cannot conceal the truth from them. Each step taken in knowledge leads them to this truth. And the truth is death.

'Art, poetry…' For a long time, under the influence of success and praise from others, I had persuaded myself that this was a thing that could be done, despite the fact of approaching death which obliterates everything: myself, my works and the memory of both. But I quickly realized that this too was a delusion. It was clear to me that art is an adornment and embellishment of life. But it had lost its charm for me, so how could I charm others? While I was not living my own life but was being carried along on the crest of another life, as long as I believed that life had meaning even if I could not express it, the reflection of life in poetry and in art of all kinds gave me joy and I enjoyed watching life through the mirror of art. But when I began to search for the meaning of life, when I began to feel the necessity of living, I found this mirror either unnecessary, superfluous and ridiculous, or tormenting. I could no longer be comforted by what I saw in the mirror, namely my stupid and desperate position. It was all right for me to rejoice in the sight while in the depths of my soul I believed that my life had meaning. Then the play of light and shade, the comic, the tragic, the touching, the beautiful, and the frightening aspects of life comforted me. But when I saw that life is meaningless and terrible, the play in the mirror could no longer amuse me. However sweet the honey, it could not be sweet to me while I saw the dragon and the mice gnawing at my support.

But that was not all. Had I simply understood that life has no meaning I might have accepted it peacefully, knowing that it was my lot. But I could not be calmed by this. If I had been like a man in a wood from which he knows there is no way out, I might have been able to live; but I was like a man in a wood who is lost, and terrified by this rushes around hoping to find his way out, knowing that with each step he is getting more lost, and yet unable to stop rushing about.

It was all quite dreadful. And so, in order to escape from this horror, I wanted to kill myself. I felt a horror of what lay ahead of me and knew that this horror was worse than my present position, but I could neither drive it away nor patiently await the end. However convincing the argument that said a blood vessel of the heart would collapse anyway, or that something would burst and it would all be over, I could not wait for the end with composure. The horror of the darkness was too great and I wanted to escape from it as quickly as possible by means of a rope or a bullet. It was this feeling that lured me, more strongly than anything else, towards suicide.

## CHAPTER 5

Several times I said to myself, ‘But perhaps I have overlooked something, or failed to understand something? It cannot be that this state of despair is common to all men.’ And I searched for an answer to my questions in all branches of knowledge acquired by man. I sought long and laboriously. I did not search half-heartedly, or out of idle curiosity, but tormentedly, persistently, day and night, like a dying man seeking salvation, and I found nothing.

I searched all branches of knowledge and not only found nothing, but was convinced that all those who had searched the realms of knowledge like myself had likewise found nothing. Not only had they found nothing, but they had plainly acknowledged the same thing that had led me to despair: the meaninglessness of life as the only indisputable piece of knowledge available to man.

I searched everywhere and thanks to a life spent in study, and to my connections with the world of learning, I had access to scholars of various disciplines. I was not denied insight into their erudition, both through books and in conversation with them, and I learnt everything that knowledge has to answer to the question of life.

For a long time I could not believe that knowledge has no answer to the question of life, other than that which it gives. For a long time it seemed to me, as I observed the air of importance and seriousness with which science asserts its propositions (which have nothing to do with human life), that I had failed to understand

something. For a long time I cowered before knowledge, and felt that the fact of my receiving no adequate answers to my question was a result of my naïveté and no fault of knowledge. But it was no laughing matter to me, it was no joke but a subject that dominated my life. I was finally forced to conclude that my questions were the only legitimate ones serving as the basis of all branches of knowledge, and that the fault did not lie with me and my questions, but with science if it had the pretension to answer these questions.

My question, the one that brought me to the point of suicide when I was fifty years old, was a most simple one that lies in the soul of every person, from a silly child to a wise old man. It is the question without which life is impossible, as I had learnt from experience. It is this: what will come of what I do today or tomorrow? What will come of my entire life?

Expressed another way the question can be put like this: why do I live? Why do I wish for anything, or do anything? Or expressed another way: is there any meaning in my life that will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death which awaits me?

I searched through human knowledge for an answer to this question, which is the same whatever way it is expressed. I found that according to their relation to the question, all branches of human knowledge are divided, almost into two opposite hemispheres, at the opposite ends of which are two poles: one

positive and one negative: yet at neither pole were there any answers to the question of life.

One branch of knowledge does not even seem to acknowledge the question and yet gives clear and precise answers to its own independently posed question: this is the realm of experimental knowledge, and at its extreme end stands mathematics. The other realm of knowledge recognizes the question but does not answer it. This is the sphere of speculative philosophy, at the extreme end of which stands metaphysics.

From my early youth I had studied speculative philosophy, but was later attracted by both mathematical and natural science. Until I had posed my question clearly to myself and the question itself had grown up within me, demanding an urgent resolution, I was satisfied with the falsified answers given by knowledge.

In the experimental sphere I said to myself, 'Everything develops, differentiates, moving towards complexity and refinement and there are laws governing this progress. You are a part of a whole. When you know as much as possible about the whole, and about the laws of its development, you will understand your place in the whole, and your own self.' Although I am ashamed to admit it, there was a time when I seemed to be satisfied with this. It was at a time when I myself was developing and growing more complex. My muscles were growing and strengthening, my memory was richer, my capacity to think and comprehend was increasing. I was growing and developing, and,

feeling this growth within myself, it was natural for me to believe that there was a law governing the world, in which I could find the answers to the questions of my life. But the time came when I stopped growing; I felt that I was no longer developing but was drying up, my muscles were growing weaker, my teeth falling out, and I saw that this law not only failed to explain anything to me, but that there had never been and never could be such a law, and that I had taken for a law something which I had discovered in myself at a certain time of my life. I examined its definition more strictly, and it became clear to me that there could be no law of perpetual development. It became apparent to me that to say that in the infinity of time and space everything is developing, becoming more perfect, complex and differentiated, is really to say nothing at all. They are all words without a meaning, for in the infinite there is no simple and complex, no before and after, and no better or worse.

The most important thing was that my own personal question, the question of what I am with all my desires, was left completely unanswered. I understood that these studies are very interesting and attractive but that their precision and clarity are inversely proportionate to their applicability to questions concerning life: the less applicable to the questions of life, the clearer and more precise they are, whereas the more they try to provide solutions to the questions of life, the more obscure and unattractive they become. If we turn to those branches of knowledge that attempt to provide solutions to the questions of life, to physiology,

psychology, biology and sociology, we encounter a startling poverty of thought, extreme lack of clarity and a completely unjustified pretension to resolve questions beyond their scope, together with continual contradiction between one thinker and another (or even with their own selves). If we turn to the branches of knowledge that are not concerned with resolving life's questions, but which answer their own specialized, scientific questions, we may be enraptured by the power of the human intellect, but we know in advance that they will provide no answers to the questions of life. These branches ignore the question. They say: 'As for what you are and why you live, we have no answers and do not involve ourselves with it. On the other hand, if you need to know about the laws governing light, or about chemical combinations, or about the laws governing the development of organisms; or if you need to know about the laws governing physical bodies and their forms, and the relationship between their size and quantity; or if you need to know about the laws governing your own mind, then we have clear, precise and irrefutable answers to all this.'

In general, the relationship of the experimental sciences to the questions of life can be expressed in this way. Question: why do I live? Answer: in the infinity of space and the infinity of time infinitely small particles mutate with infinite complexity. When you understand the laws of these mutations you will understand why you live.

Then moving into the speculative sphere I would say to myself: 'All mankind lives and develops according to spiritual principles and *ideals* which guide it. These ideals are expressed in religions, sciences, arts and forms of government. As these ideals become more elevated mankind advances towards greater well-being. I am a part of mankind and my duty therefore is to enhance the recognition and realization of these ideals.' During my weak-minded period I was satisfied with this. But as soon as the question of life presented itself to me clearly, the whole of this theory instantly crumbled to dust. As well as the careless vagueness with which this kind of knowledge draws conclusions, and makes generalized deductions about humanity based on a study of only a small proportion of it; as well as the mutual contradictions between the different supporters of this theory as to what man's ideals actually are, the peculiarity, not to say the stupidity, of this view is that in order to answer the question facing us all: what am I? or: why do I live? or: what must I do? man must first resolve the question of what this life of mankind is, of which so little is known and of which he can know only a minute portion in a fraction of a moment of time? In order to understand what he is man must first understand the entire mystery of humanity, a humanity made up of people like himself, who do not understand themselves.

I must confess there was a time when I believed this. It was at a time when I had my own favourite ideals which justified my whims, and I endeavoured to concoct a theory by which I could look upon my whims as laws governing mankind. But once the

question of life had risen up in my soul with full clarity, this answer immediately vanished into thin air. I came to realize that just as with the experimental sciences there are genuine sciences and semi-sciences, both trying to give answers beyond their scope, there are similarly a whole series of extremely diverse sciences, also trying to answer questions beyond their scope. These semi-sciences, the judicial, social and historical sciences, all endeavour to resolve man's questions by giving the appearance, each in its own way, of resolving the question of life that concerns all mankind.

But just as in the realms of experimental sciences a person who sincerely asks how he ought to live cannot be satisfied with an answer advising him to study the infinite complexities and mutations of an infinite number of particles in the infinity of space and time; similarly a person who sincerely asks how he ought to live cannot be satisfied with an answer telling him that in order to understand himself he must first study the life of the whole of humanity, of which neither the beginning nor the end is known, nor even the smallest part. And, as with the experimental semi-sciences, the more these other sciences diverge from their purpose, the more they become filled with vagueness, lack of precision, stupidities and contradictions. The problem concerning experimental science is the sequence of cause and effect in material phenomena. Experimental science only has to be introduced to the question of final causes for it to turn into a nonsense. The problem facing speculative science is acknowledgement of the essence of

life that lies beyond cause and effect. And one only has to introduce causative phenomena, such as social or historical data, into the investigations and it turns into a nonsense.

Experimental science, therefore, only deals with positive knowledge and reveals the greatness of the human intellect when it does not introduce the question of ultimate causes into its inquiries. Abstract science, on the other hand, only becomes a science and only reveals the greatness of the human intellect when it completely avoids questions concerning the sequence of causative phenomena and examines man only in relation to an ultimate cause. An example of this science, situated at the pole of the hemisphere, is metaphysics, or abstract philosophy. This science clearly poses the question: who am I? And: what is the universe? Why do I exist and why does the universe exist? And since it has existed this science has always given the same answer. Whether the philosopher calls the essence of life that is within me and within everything an idea, or a substance, a spirit or a will, he is saying the same thing: that I exist and that *I* am this essence. But how and why he does not know, and if he is a precise thinker he does not answer. I ask, 'Why does this essence exist? What comes of the fact that it is and will be?' And philosophy not only fails to answer but can only ask the same thing itself. And if it is a true philosophy, its whole task lies precisely in posing this question clearly. And if it holds firmly to its purpose then it can have no other answer to the question of what I am and what the universe is

than: ‘All and nothing.’ And to the question of why the universe exists and why I exist, then: ‘I do not know.’

Thus, whatever way I twist these speculative answers of philosophy, I can find nothing resembling an answer. This is not because, as in the case of the clear, experimental sciences, the answer does not relate to the question, but because despite all the intellectual effort directed at my question, there is no answer. And instead of an answer all one gets is the same question, only put in a more complicated form.

## CHAPTER 6

In my search for answers to the question of life I felt just like a man who is lost in a wood.

I came to a clearing, climbed a tree and saw clearly into the never-ending distance. But there was no house there, nor could there be. I walked into the thicket, into the gloom and saw the darkness, but there was no house there either.

In the same way I wandered in the forest of human knowledge, both amidst the bright rays of mathematical knowledge and experimental knowledge, where wide horizons were opened up to me, but in a direction where I could find no house, and amidst the darkness of speculative knowledge where I was immersed in ever deeper gloom the further I progressed. And I became quite convinced that there was not, and could not be, a way out.

When I inclined to the bright side of knowledge I realized that I was only avoiding facing the question. However bright and attractive those horizons spreading out before me were, and however tempting it was to immerse myself in the infinity of all this knowledge, I already knew that the clearer the knowledge was, the less I needed it, and the less it answered my question. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'I know everything that science so urgently wants to know and along that path there is no answer to the question of the meaning of my life. In the speculative realm I knew that despite the fact, or rather precisely because of the fact, that the primary purpose of this knowledge is to answer my question,

the answer given was none other than the one I had already given myself: what is the meaning of my life? It has none. Or: what will come of my life? Nothing. Or: why does everything there is exist, and why do I exist? Because it does.

When I put my questions to one branch of human knowledge I received a countless number of precise answers to things I had not asked: the chemical composition of the stars, the movement of the sun towards the constellation Hercules, the origin of the species and of man, the forms of infinitely tiny atoms, the fluctuations of infinitely small and imponderable particles of ether. But the only answer this branch of knowledge provided to my question concerning the meaning of life was this: you are that which you call your life; you are a temporary, incidental accumulation of particles. The mutual interaction and alteration of these particles produces in you something you refer to as your life. This accumulation can only survive for a limited length of time; when the interaction of these particles ceases, that which you call life will cease, bringing an end to all your questions. You are a randomly united lump of something. This lump decomposes and the fermentation is called your life. The lump will disintegrate and the fermentation will end, together with all your questions. This is the answer given by the exact side of knowledge, and if it adheres strictly to its principles, it cannot answer otherwise.

However, the truth is that this answer does not reply to the question. I need to know the meaning of my life, and the fact that

it is a particle of infinity not only fails to give it any meaning, but eliminates any possible meaning.

The experimental side of knowledge vaguely compromises with the speculative side in saying that the meaning of life lies in development and in the encouragement of this development. But owing to the inaccuracies and obscurities these cannot be regarded as answers.

Whenever the other side of knowledge, the speculative realm, sticks firmly to its principles and gives direct answers to the question, it has always, throughout the ages, given the same answer: the universe is something infinite and incomprehensible. Man's life is an inscrutable part of this inscrutable 'whole'. Again I exclude all the compromises made between the speculative and experimental sciences, which support a whole array of semi-sciences: the so-called judicial, political and historical sciences. In these sciences there is the same mistaken approach to the understanding of development and perfection, with the only difference that in one instance we have the development of everything, and in the other the development of people's lives. The mistake is identical: development and perfection can have no purpose or direction in infinity, and as far as my question is concerned, no answer.

When speculative knowledge is exact, namely in true philosophy, and not that which Schopenhauer calls professorial philosophy (which serves only to divide all existing phenomena

into new philosophical categories, with new names), here when philosophy does not lose sight of the essential question, the answer is always the same as the one given by Socrates, Schopenhauer, Solomon and Buddha.

'We grow closer to the truth only to the extent that we grow further away from life,' says Socrates when preparing himself for death. 'What do we, who love the truth, strive for in life? In order to be free of the body and of all the evil that arises from the life of the body. If this is so then how can we fail to rejoice when death approaches?'

'The wise man seeks death throughout his life, and therefore death is not frightening to him.'[10]

'If we understand the inner essence of the universe as will,' says Schopenhauer, 'and if we understand all phenomena, from the dark forces of nature to the full conscious activity of man, as no more than the objectivity of the will, we cannot escape the conclusion that it is in the free denial and self-renunciation of the will that all phenomena disappear; the constant striving and the aimless and untiring allurement towards all the levels of subjectivity in which, and through which, the universe exists will disappear, as will all the various subsequent forms. When form disappears so too will all phenomena of form, including both space and time, until eventually even the last basis of form will disappear, i.e. subject and object. There is no idea without will, and no universe. Before us, of course, there remains only

nothingness. But that which opposes this transition into nothingness, our nature, is but our own will to exist (*Will zum Leben*), of which both we and our universe are made up. That we are afraid of nothingness, or that we wish to live, only indicates that we ourselves are nothing other than this desire to live and we know nothing other than this. Therefore what remains to us, who are so full of will after the annihilation of the will, is of course nothingness; on the other hand, in those in whom the will has been reversed and renounced, this universe of ours that is so real with all its suns and galaxies *is nothingness*.'[11]

'Vanity of vanities,' says Solomon, 'all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever… The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after. I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit… I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have

gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad: and of mirth, what doeth it? I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the

works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of the spirit, and there was no profit, from them under the sun. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? Even that which hath been already done. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then I said in my heart, as it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? As the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yes, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me… For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail is grief, yea his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour…

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the

unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. There is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all; yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever of any thing that is done under the sun.'

Thus speaks Solomon, or the person who wrote these words.[12]

This is what an Indian sage says: 'Saki-Muni, a young and happy Prince, from whom illness, old age and death had been kept secret, went out for a drive one day and saw a frightful, toothless, drivelling old man. The Prince, who until now knew nothing of old age, was aghast and asked the driver what it was and what had brought the man to such a pitiful, repulsive and ugly state. When he learnt that it is a fate common to all men and that he, a young Prince, inevitably faced the same thing, he could go no further and gave orders to return home so that he could think it over. He shut himself up alone and reflected on it. Presumably his thoughts consoled him because he went out again, happy and cheerful, for another drive. But this time he met a sick man. He saw an

emaciated bluish, trembling man, with dim eyes. The Prince, from whom sickness had been hidden, stopped the driver and asked what this was. When he discovered that it was sickness, to which all people are susceptible and that he, a healthy and happy Prince, might become sick tomorrow, he again lost the spirit to be cheerful and demanded to be taken home, where he again sought solace. He probably found it for he set out again, for the third time. But on this occasion he saw yet another new thing: he saw some people carrying something. 'What is it?' 'A dead man.' 'What does dead mean?' asked the Prince. He was told that to be dead was to be what this man was. The Prince went up to the dead body, uncovered it and looked at it. 'What will become of him now?' he asked. The Prince was told that the man would be buried in the ground. 'Why?' 'Because he will never live again and all that will come of him is stench and worms.' 'And is this the fate of all men? Will it happen to me too? Will I be buried and give off a stench and be consumed by worms?' 'Yes.' 'Go back! I do not wish to go for a drive. I will never go for a drive again!'

Saki-Muni could find no consolation in life and resolved that life is a great evil, and he devoted all the strength of his soul to freeing himself, and others, from life. He wanted to free them in such a way that after death life would not be renewed anywhere, but would be completely annihilated, at the roots. This is what all Indian sages say.

These then are the straightforward answers given by human wisdom in reply to the questions of life:

‘The life of the body is evil and a lie. And since the annihilation of the life of the body is a blessing we must long for it,’ says Socrates.

‘Life is that which it should not be: evil. The transition into nothingness is the only thing sacred in life,’says Schopenhauer.

‘Everything in the world, both folly and wisdom, richness and poverty, happiness and grief, all is vanity and emptiness. A man dies and nothing remains. This is absurd,’says Solomon.

‘It is impossible to live in the consciousness that suffering, weakening, old age and death are inevitable; we must free ourselves from life, from all possibility of life,’says Buddha.

And the very same thing said by these powerful minds has been said and thought by millions of people similar to them. And I too have thought and felt it.

And thus my perusals in the realms of knowledge not only failed to lead me out of my despair, but simply increased it. One branch of knowledge did not answer the question of life; the other gave an answer but the reply only confirmed my despair and showed me that the conclusion I had reached was not the result of my erring ways, or of a morbid state of mind. On the contrary it convinced me that what I had thought was correct, and in accord with the conclusions reached by the most penetrating human minds.

To deceive oneself is pointless. All is vanity. Happy is he who was never born. Death is better than life; one must free oneself from it.

## CHAPTER 7

Failing to find an explanation in knowledge I began to search for it in life, hoping to find it among the people around me. I began to observe how these people like myself lived, and how they dealt with the question that had led me to despair.

And this is what I discovered among people whose position in life, as regards education and lifestyle, was similar to my own.

I found that these people of my circle had four methods of escape from the dreadful situation in which we all find ourselves.

The first method of escape is that of ignorance. It consists of failing to recognize, or understand, that life is evil and absurd. The majority of the people of this kind are either women, or very young, or very stupid and have not yet understood the problem of life that presented itself to Schopenhauer, Solomon and Buddha. They see neither the dragon that is waiting for them, nor the mice that are gnawing away at the bush from which they are clinging, and they lick the drops of honey. But they only lick them for a while: something will turn their attention to the dragon and the mice and their licking will come to an end. There was nothing I could learn from them, for we can never cease knowing what we know.

The second method of escape is that of epicureanism. It consists, while knowing the hopelessness of life, of enjoying the blessings we have without looking at the dragon or the mice, and of licking

the honey in the best possible way, especially if a lot of it has fallen on the bush. Solomon describes this method thus:

Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun…

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart… Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun… Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is not work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest' (Ecclesiastes, VIII.15, IX.7, 9–10).

This second method of escape sustains the majority of people of our circle. The conditions in which they find themselves dictate that they have a greater share of the good things in life than the bad; their moral torpor allows them to forget that all the privileges of their position are accidental and that not everyone can have a thousand wives and palaces as Solomon did; that for every man with a thousand wives there are a thousand men without wives, and that for every palace there are a thousand men who built it by the sweat of their brow, and that the same chance that has made you Solomon today might make you Solomon's slave tomorrow. The inertia of these people's imagination enables them to forget

why it was Buddha was granted no peace: the inevitability of illness, old age and death, which can, if not today then tomorrow, destroy all these pleasures. The fact that a number of these people affirm that the dullness of their thought and imagination is something called ‘positive philosophy’fails, in my opinion, to make them any different from the ranks of those who, failing to see the question, lick the honey. I could not imitate these people, for not sharing their dullness of imagination I could not create it artificially in myself. Like any man who sincerely lives I could not turn my eyes away from the mice and the dragon once I had seen them.

The third method of escape is through strength and energy. It consists of realizing that life is evil and senseless, and of destroying it. This is what a few strong and consistent people do. Having understood the utter stupidity of the joke that is being played on them, and realizing that the blessings of the dead are far greater than the blessings of the living, and that the best thing of all is not to live, they act accordingly and instantly bring an end to this stupid joke, using any available means: a noose around the neck, water, a stab in the heart, a train on a railway line. There are increasing numbers of people belonging to our circle who act in this way. On the whole those who behave like this do so during the prime of their life, when the strength of the soul is in full force and few of the habits that undermine human reason have yet been acquired. I saw that this was the most worthy mode of escape and wanted to follow it through.

The fourth road of escape is that of weakness. It consists of clinging to a life that is evil and futile, knowing in advance that nothing can come of it. People belonging to this category know that death is preferable to life but, lacking the strength to act rationally and bring a quick end to the deception by killing themselves, they seem to wait for something. This is the escape of weakness, for if I know of something better and it is within my reach, then why not yield to it? I myself belonged to this category.

Thus, people of my kind have four ways of saving themselves from a terrible contradiction. However hard I strained my mental faculties I could find no other than these four modes of escape. In the first method there is a failure to understand that life is meaningless, vain and evil and that it is better not to live. I could not help knowing this, and once I had realized it I could not close my eyes to it. The second method is to make use of life, such as it is, without thinking about the future. Neither could I do this. Like Saki-Muni, I could not ride out hunting when I knew that suffering, old age and death exist. My imagination was too fertile. Moreover I could not take pleasure in those fleeting occasions which momentarily threw pleasure on my existence. The third method is to have realized that life is evil and absurd and to bring it to an end by killing oneself. The fourth method of escape is to live like Solomon and Schopenhauer, knowing that life is a stupid joke being played on us, but nevertheless continuing to live, to wash, to dress, to eat, to talk, and even to write books. Although I found if offensive and painful I remained in this position.

I can now see that if I did not kill myself it was because of some vague awareness that my ideas were mistaken. No matter how convincing and irrefutable I felt my train of thoughts to be, as well as that of the wise ideas that had led us all to the conclusion that life is meaningless I still had some obscure doubts as to the validity of the final outcome of my deliberations.

It was expressed as follows: I, that is my reason, have acknowledged that life is irrational. If there is nothing higher than reason (and there is not, and nothing can prove that there is), then reason is the creator of life for me. Without reason I can have no life. How then can reason deny life when it is the creator of it? Or looking at it another way: if there were no life my reason would not exist, which must mean that reason is the offspring of life. Life is everything. Reason is the fruit of life and yet this reason rejects life itself. I felt that something was not quite right here.

Life is a senseless evil, that is certain, I said to myself. Yet I have lived and still live, and so too humanity has lived and still lives. How can this be? Why do men live when it is possible not to live? Can it be that only Schopenhauer and I have been intelligent enough to understand the senselessness and evil of life?

The argument about the vanity of life is not particularly subtle and all simple folk have known it for a long time; yet they have lived and still live. How is it they all live and never think of doubting the logic of life?

My knowledge, confirmed by the wisdom of the sages, had revealed to me that everything in the world, organic and inorganic, is arranged with the most unusual intelligence, and it is only my postition that is absurd. But these fools, the vast masses of simple folk, while knowing nothing about the organic and inorganic arrangement of the world, continue to live and feel that life is very sensibly organized!

And it occurred to me that there might be something I did not yet know. After all, that is exactly how ignorance behaves. Ignorance always says what I am saying. When it does not know something it says that the thing it does not know is stupid. In any event it appears that there is a whole section of mankind that has lived and still lives, as if it knew the meaning of life, for without knowing this meaning it could not live. Yet I am saying that all life is meaningless and that I cannot live.

No one prevents Schopenhauer and me from denying life. Go ahead then, kill yourself and you won't have to think about it again. If you don't like life kill yourself. If you live and cannot understand the meaning of it, put an end to it, but don't turn around and start talking and writing about the fact that you don't understand life. You find yourself in cheerful company, where everyone is happy and know what they are doing, so if you find it boring and objectionable, leave!

For in the end what are we, who are convinced that suicide is obligatory and yet cannot resolve to commit it, other than the

weakest, the most inconsistent and, speaking frankly, the most stupid of people, making such a song and dance with our banalities.

After all, our wisdom, however irrefutable it may be, has provided us with no understanding of the meaning of life. Yet all those millions who make up humanity manage to live without ever doubting its meaning.

Indeed, since those long ago days when life began and of which I know nothing, people who knew the argument about the vanity of life (which seems to me to prove its senselessness), have nevertheless lived and brought to life a meaning of their own. Ever since there has been some form of human life, people have had this understanding of life, and have pursued this life, and passed it down to me. Everything that is in me and around me is the fruit of their understanding of life. These very instruments of thought with which I judge life, and condemn it, were made by them and not by me. I myself was born, educated and grew up thanks to them. They dug up the iron, taught us how to fell wood, tamed the cattle and the horses, taught us how to sow the crops and how to live together; they created an order in life. They taught me how to think and speak. I am their offspring, provided by them with food and water, taught by them, able to think and speak using their thoughts and words, and now I have proved to them that it is all senseless! ‘There is something wrong here,’ I told myself, ‘I have

made a mistake somewhere.’But I could not discover where the mistake lay.

## CHAPTER 8

None of these doubts, which I can now express more or less coherently, could I have formulated at the time. At the time I simply felt that despite the fact that my deductions about the vanity of life were logically unavoidable and were confirmed by the greatest thinkers, there was still something wrong with them. Whether it was in my reasoning, or whether it was in my formulation of the question, I did not know. I simply felt that the reasoning behind my conviction was complete, but that it was not enough. All these conclusions failed to persuade me to follow my argument to its end, that is to kill myself. I would not be speaking the truth if I said that it was through my reason that I arrived where I did and yet did not kill myself. My reason was working, but so too was something else that I can only call a consciousness of life. There was also another force at work which made me pay attention to the latter and not to the former. It was this force that led me out of my state of despair and guided my reason in an entirely different direction. It compelled me to pay attention to the fact that I, and the hundreds of others similar to myself, do not comprise the whole of humanity, and that I still did not know what this life of humanity was.

As I looked around at the narrow circle of my colleagues I saw nothing but people who had failed to understand the question, or who had understood it but drowned it in the intoxication of life, or who had understood it and had put an end to their lives, or who

understood it but through weakness continued living in despair. And I saw no others. I thought that this narrow circle of scholars, and of rich and distinguished people, to which I belonged made up the whole of mankind and that the millions who had lived and still live were THEM, some sort of cattle, people.

It seems so strange to me now, so utterly incomprehensible, that in my reasoning of life I could have overlooked the life of humanity that surrounded me on all sides and that I could have been so ridiculously mistaken as to think that my life, and the life of Solomon and Schopenhauer, was the true, normal life, while the lives of millions was not worthy of attention. However strange it may seem now, I know it was so at the time. Amidst the wanderings of my conceited mind I felt certain that Solomon, Schopenhauer and myself had posed the question so honestly and exactly that there could be no two ways about it. I felt so certain that all these millions simply belonged to the category of those who had not yet penetrated the depths of the question, that as I searched for the meaning of my life it never once occurred to me to think: 'What sort of meaning do all the millions who have lived, and do live in the world give to their lives?'

I lived in this state of madness for a long time. It is a state which if not in deed then in words is very characteristic of more liberated and learned people. But whether it was thanks to my somewhat strange and instinctive love of the true working people that I was forced to understand them and to realize that they are

not as stupid as we thought; or whether it was thanks to the sincerity of my conviction that I knew of nothing better to do than hang myself, I sensed anyway that if I wanted to live and to understand the meaning of life I must not seek it among those who have lost it and wish to kill themselves, but among the millions of people living and dead who have created life, and who carry the weight of our lives together with their own. And I looked around at the enormous masses of simple, uneducated people without wealth, who have lived and who still live, and I saw something quite different. I saw that with a few exceptions all those millions do not fit into my divisions, and that I could not categorize them as people who did not understand the question because they themselves posed, and answered, the question with unusual clarity. Neither could I categorize them as epicureans, since their lives rest more on deprivation and suffering than on pleasure. I could still less regard them as living out their meaningless lives irrationally, since they could explain every act of their lives, including death. They considered suicide the greatest evil. It appeared that mankind as a whole had some kind of comprehension of the meaning of life that I did not acknowledge and derided. It followed that rational knowledge does not provide the meaning of life, but excludes it; while the meaning given to life by the millions of people, by humanity as a whole, is founded on some sort of knowledge that is despised and considered false.

Rational knowledge, as presented by the learned and wise, negates the meaning of life, yet the vast masses – humanity as a

whole – recognize that this meaning lies in irrational knowledge. And this irrational knowledge is faith, the very thing that I could not help rejecting. This God, one in three, the creation in six days, the devils and angels and all the rest that I could not accept without going mad.

My position was terrible. I knew that I could find nothing along the path of rational knowledge, other than negation of life. While in faith I found nothing other than a negation of reason, which was even more impossible than denial of life. According to rational knowledge life is an evil and people know it. They have the choice of ending their lives and yet they have always carried on living, just as I myself have done, despite having known for a long time that life is meaningless and evil. According to faith it follows that in order to comprehend the meaning of life I must renounce my reason, the very thing for which meaning was necessary.

## CHAPTER 9

A contradiction arose from which there were only two ways out: either that which I called reasonable was not as reasonable as I thought, or that which I felt to be irrational was not as irrational as I thought. And I started to check the line of argument that stemmed from my rational knowledge.

As I checked this line of argument I found it to be entirely correct. The conclusion that life is nothing was inevitable, but I spotted a mistake. The mistake was that my thinking did not correspond to the question I had posed. The question was: why do I live? Or: is there anything that will remain and not be annihilated of my illusory and transitory life? Or: what meaning has my finite existence in an infinite universe? In order to answer this question I studied life.

Clearly the solution to all the possible questions of life could not satisfy me because my question, however simple it may seem at first, involves a demand for an explanation of the finite by means of the infinite and vice versa.

I had asked: what meaning has life beyond time, beyond space and beyond cause? And I was answering the question: 'What is the meaning of my life within time, space and cause?' The result was that after long and laboured thought I could only answer: none.

In my deliberations I was continually drawing comparisons between the finite and the finite, and the infinite and the infinite, and I could not have done otherwise. Thus I reached the only

conclusion I could reach: force is force, matter is matter, will is will, the infinite is the infinite, nothing is nothing; and I could go no further than that.

It was somewhat similar to what happens in mathematics when, trying to resolve an equation, we get an identity. The method of deduction is correct, but the only answer obtained is that a equals a, and x equals x, or o equals o. Precisely the same thing was happening with my reasoning concerning the meaning of life. The only answers the sciences give to this question are identities.

And really, strictly rational knowledge, such as that of Descartes,[13] begins with complete doubt in everything and throws aside any knowledge founded on faith, reconstructing everything along laws of reason and experiment. And it can provide no answer other than the one I reached: an indefinite one. It was only at first that I thought knowledge had given an affirmative answer, Schopenhauer's answer that life has no meaning and is evil. But when I went into the matter I realized that this answer is not affirmative and that it was only my senses that had taken it to be so. Strictly expressed, as it is by the Brahmins, Solomon, and Schopenhauer, the answer is but a vague one, an identity: o equals o, life presented to me as nothing is nothing. Thus, philosophical knowledge denies nothing but simply replies that it cannot solve the question, and that as far as it is concerned any resolution remains indefinite.

Having understood this, I realized that it was impossible to search for an answer to my questions in rational knowledge; that the answer given by rational knowledge simply suggests that the answer can only be obtained by stating the question in another way, by introducing the question of the relation of the finite to the infinite. I realized that no matter how irrational and distorted the answers given by faith might be, they had the advantage of introducing to every answer a relationship between the finite and the infinite, without which there can be no solution. Whichever way I put the question: how am I to live? the answer is always: according to God's law. Or to the question: is there anything real that will come of my life? the answer is: eternal torment or eternal bliss. Or, to the question: what meaning is there that is not destroyed by death? the answer is: unity with the infinite, God, heaven.

Thus in addition to rational knowledge, which I had hitherto thought to be the only knowledge, I was inevitably led to acknowledge that there does exist another kind of knowledge – an irrational one – possessed by humanity as a whole: faith, which affords the possibility of living. Faith remained as irrational to me as before, but I could not fail to recognize that it alone provides mankind with the answers to the question of life, and consequently with the possibility of life.

Rational knowledge had led me to recognize that life is meaningless. My life came to a halt and I wanted to kill myself. As

I looked around at people, at humanity as a whole, I saw that they lived and affirmed that they knew the meaning of life. I looked at myself. I had lived as long as I knew the meaning of life. For me, as for others, faith provided the meaning of life and the possibility of living.

Having looked around further at people in other countries and at my contemporaries and predecessors, I saw the same thing. Where there is life there is faith. Since the day of creation faith has made it possible for mankind to live, and the essential aspects of that faith are always and everywhere the same.

Whatever answers faith gives, regardless of which faith, or to whom the answers are given, such answers always give an infinite meaning to the finite existence of man; a meaning that is not destroyed by suffering, deprivation or death. This means that only in faith can we find the meaning and possibility of life. I realized that the essential meaning of faith lies not only in the 'manifestations of things unseen', and so on, or in revelation (this is only a description of one of the signs of faith); not is it simply the relationship between man and God (it is necessary to define faith, then God, and not God through faith); nor is it an agreement with what one has been told, although this is what faith is commonly understood to be. Faith is a knowledge of the meaning of human life, the consequence of which is that man does not kill himself but lives. Faith is the force of life. If a man lives, then he must believe in something. If he did not believe that there was

something he must live for he would not live. If he does not see and comprehend the illusion of the finite he will believe in the finite. If he does understand the illusion of the finite, he is bound to believe in the infinite. Without faith it is impossible to live.

I recalled the whole course of my inner thinking and was horrified. It was now clear to me that in order for man to live he must either be unaware of the infinite, or he must have some explanation of the meaning of life by which the finite can be equated with the infinite. I had this explanation but it was no use to me while I believed in the finite; and I began to test it against my reason. And in the light of reason my former explanation vanished into thin air. But the time came when I no longer believed in the finite. And then I began, on a rational basis, to construct out of what I knew an explanation which might give a meaning to life; but nothing came of it. Together with the finest human intellects I reached the conclusion that o equals o and was most astonished at reaching this conclusion and that there could be no other.

What did I do when I searched for an answer in the experimental sciences? I wanted to find out why I lived and I therefore studied everything that exists outside myself. It became clear that I could discover a great deal, but nothing of what I needed.

What happened when I searched for the answer in the realms of philosophy? I studied the thoughts of those who found themselves

in the same predicament as myself and who had no answer to the question of why we live. It was apparent that I could discover nothing here that I did not already know: namely that it is impossible to know anything.

What am I? A part of the infinite. It is indeed in these words that the whole problem lies. Can it be that this question has only occurred to man so recently? Can it be that no one before me has posed this question to himself, such a simple question, one that might spring to the lips of any intelligent child?

Surely this question has been raised ever since man has existed. Since the beginning it has been evident that solving the question by equating the finite with the finite is just as unsatisfactory as equating the infinite with the infinite. Since time immemorial man has striven to express the relationship between the finite and the infinite.

All the concepts we use to compare the finite to the infinite, and to arrive at an understanding of life, of the concepts of God, freedom and goodness, are put to the test of logic. But they fail to stand up to the critique of reason.

If it were not so frightening it would be amusing to observe the pride and complacency with which we, like children, take apart the watch, pull out the spring and make a toy of it, and are then surprised when the watch stops working.

It is both valuable and necessary to have a solution to the contradiction between the finite and the infinite, an answer to the

question of life that makes it possible to live. The one solution we always find everywhere, among all peoples, is the solution that has been passed down to us from times we have lost all record of. It is such a difficult solution that we would be unable to devise anything like it. And it is a solution which we casually destroy so that we may yet again pose the question that confronts us all, and for which we do not have an answer.

The concepts of an infinite God, the sanctity of the soul, the relationship between God and the affairs of man, of moral good and evil, are all concepts that have been worked out in history, through the life of a humanity that is hidden to us. Without the existence of these concepts there would be neither life nor myself, and yet I, rejecting all the efforts of humanity, wanted to do it all over again, alone, in my own way.

I did not think so at the time but the germs of these thoughts were already within me. I realized that: (1) Despite our intelligence the contentions of Schopenhauer, Solomon and myself were foolish: we considered life to be evil and nevertheless continued to live. This was apparent stupidity because, if life is meaningless and I am so fond of reason, then I must destroy life so that no one can deny it. (2) All our arguments went round in a vicious circle, like a wheel that is not attached to the carriage. However much, and however well, we deliberated, we could find no answer to the question because o will always equal o, and therefore, our method must be mistaken. (3) I began to realize that

the most profound wisdom of man is preserved in the answers given by faith, and that I did not have the right to negate them on grounds of reason and, above all, that it is these answers alone that can reply to the question of life.

## CHAPTER 10

I could see this but it did not make matters any easier for me.

I was now prepared to accept any faith so long as it did not demand a direct denial of reason, which would have been a deceit. So I studied books on Buddhism and Mohammedanism and above all I studied Christianity, both through its writings and through people living around me.

Naturally I first turned to believers from my own circle, to learned people, Orthodox theologians, elder monks, theologians of the newest types of Orthodoxy, and even to the so-called New Christians who taught salvation through faith in redemption. I seized on these believers and questioned them on how they believed and what they understood to be the meaning of life.

Despite making all possible allowances and avoiding all arguments I could not accept the faith of these people. I saw that what they took to be faith gave no explanation to the meaning of life but obscured it, and that they themselves did not profess their faith in response to the question of life, that had led me to faith, but for some other reasons which were alien to me.

I recall the tormenting feeling of fear should I return to my former despair, after the hope I had experienced so many times in my relations with these people. The more precisely they expounded their teachings to me, the more clearly I saw their errors, until I lost all hope of finding an explanation to the meaning of life in their faith.

I was not so much alienated by the fact that in expounding their religious beliefs they confused Christian truths that had always been close to me with much that was unnecessary and irrational. It was more the fact that the lives of these people were just like my own, with the only difference that they did not live according to the principles expounded in their teachings. I felt strongly that they were deceiving themselves and that, like myself, they had no other concept of life than of living while they lived and of grabbing hold of everything they could. I saw this from the fact that if they had possessed a meaning that annihilated the fear of deprivation, suffering and death, they would not have been afraid of these things. But these believers of our class lived, just as I did, in excess, striving to maintain and increase it and fearing deprivation, suffering and death. Like myself and all non-believers, they lived only to satisfy their desires and they lived just as badly as, if not worse than, non-believers.

No arguments could convince me of the truth of their faith. Only actions showing me that they had an understanding of life that did not make them afraid, as I was, of poverty, sickness and death might have convinced me. But I witnessed no such behaviour among the believers of my circle. So that, while I witnessed this sort of behaviour among those of my circle who did not believe, I never witnessed it among the so-called believers.

I realized that the belief these men had was not the faith I was seeking and that their faith is not really faith but only one of the

epicurean consolations in life. I understood that while this faith might perhaps serve, if not for consolation, then as some kind of distraction for a repentant Solomon on his deathbed, it is entirely unsuitable for the vast majority of mankind who do not seek amusement at the expense of other men's labour, but to make something of life. In order for mankind to live and to perpetuate life, instilling it with meaning, these millions must all have some different, more genuine concept of faith. Indeed it was not that neither I nor Solomon, nor Schopenhauer, had killed ourselves that convinced me of the existence of faith, but the fact that these millions have lived and still live, bearing those like Solomon and myself on the crest of their lives.

And I began to grow close to the believers among the poor, simple, uneducated folk: pilgrims, monks, sectarians and peasants. The belief held by these people was the same Christianity as that of the pseudo-believers of my circle. They too had mixed a great deal of superstition alongside Christian truths, but the difference was that while superstition was quite unnecessary to the believers of my circle, had nothing to do with their lives and simply provided some kind of epicurean distraction, the superstitions of the believer belonging to the labouring section of the population were so interconnected with their lives that they could not have conceived of life without them; they were a necessary condition of their lives. The whole way of life of the believers of my own circle stood in contradiction to their faith, whereas the whole way of life of the believers from the working population reaffirmed the meaning

their faith gave to life. And I started to look more closely at the life and faith of these people, and the further I looked the more convinced I became that theirs was the true faith, that their faith was essential to them, and that it alone provides a sense of the meaning and possibility of life. In contrast to what I saw among the people of my class where it is possible to live without faith and where among the thousands there is barely one who can admit to being a believer, among them there is hardly one in a thousand who does not believe. In contrast to what I saw happening in my own circle, where the whole of life is spent in idleness, amusement and dissatisfaction with life, I saw that these people who laboured hard throughout their entire lives were less dissatisfied with life than the rich. In contrast to the people of our class who resist and curse the privations and sufferings of their lot, these people accept sickness and grief without question or protest, and with a calm and firm conviction that this is how it must be, that it cannot be otherwise and that it is all for the good. Contrary to us, who the more intelligent we are the less we understand the meaning of life and see some kind of malicious joke in the fact that we suffer and die, these people live, suffer and approach death peacefully and, more often than not, joyfully. In contrast to the fact that a peaceful death, a death without horror and despair, is a most rare exception in our circle, a tormented, rebellious and unhappy death is a most rare exception amongst these people. And there are millions and millions of these people who are deprived of all those things, which for the Solomons and I are the only blessings in life,

and who nevertheless find tremendous happiness in life. I looked more widely around me. I looked at the lives of the multitudes who have lived in the past and who live today. And of those who understood the meaning of life I saw not two, or three, or ten, but hundreds, thousands and millions. And all of them, endlessly varied in their customs, minds, educations and positions, and in complete contrast to my ignorance, knew the meaning of life and death, endured suffering and hardship, lived and died and saw this not as vanity but good.

And I came to love these people. The further I penetrated into the lives of those living and dead about whom I had read and heard, the more I loved them and the easier it became for me to live. I lived like this for about two years and a great change took place within me, for which I had been preparing for a long time and the roots of which had always been in me. What happened was that the life of our class, the rich and learned, became not only distasteful to me, but lost all meaning. All our activities, our discussions, our science and our art struck me as sheer indulgence. I realized that there was no meaning to be found here. It was the activities of the labouring people, those who produce life, that presented itself to me as the only true way. I realized that the meaning provided by this life was truth and I accepted it.

## CHAPTER 11

I remembered how these very beliefs repelled me and seemed devoid of any meaning when they were professed by people who lived in contradiction to them, and I remembered how these same beliefs attracted me and seemed sensible when I saw people living in accord with them; and I realized why I had rejected them and found them meaningless and why I now accepted them and found them full of meaning. I realized that I had been lost, and how I had become lost. I had strayed not so much because my ideas had been incorrect as because I had lived foolishly. I realized that I had been blinded from the truth not so much through my mistaken thoughts as through my life itself, which had been spent in satisfying desire and in exclusive conditions of epicureanism. I realized that my question as to what my life is, and the answer that it is an evil, was quite correct. The only mistake was that I had extended an answer that related only to myself to life as a whole. I had asked myself what my life was and had received the answer that it is evil and meaningless. And this was quite true, for my life of indulgent pursuits was meaningless and evil, but that answer applied only to my life and not to human life in general. I understood a truism that I subsequently found in the gospels: that people often preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil. For he who acts maliciously hates light and avoids it so as not to throw light on his deeds. I understood that in order to understand life it is first of all necessary that life is not evil and meaningless, and then

one may use reason in order to elucidate it. I realized why I had for so long been treading so close to such an obvious truth without seeing it, and that in order to think and speak about human life one must think and speak about human life and not about the lives of a few parasites. The truth has always been the truth, just as $2 \times 2 = 4$, but I had not admitted it, because in acknowledging that $2 \times 2 = 4$ I would have had to admit that I was a bad man. And it was more important and necessary for me to feel that I was good than to admit that $2 \times 2 = 4$. I came to love good people and to loathe myself, and I acknowledged the truth. And then it all became clear to me.

Imagine an executioner who has spent all his life torturing people and chopping off heads, or a hopeless drunkard, or a madman who has spent his entire life in a dark room which he detests but imagines that he would die if he left it – imagine if they should ask themselves, 'What is life?' Obviously the only answer they could come up with is that life is the greatest of evils. The madman's answer would be absolutely correct, but only with respect to himself. Suppose I am such a madman? Suppose all of us who are wealthy and learned are such madmen?

And I realized that we really are such madmen. I, at any rate, was one. Indeed, a bird is made in such a way that it can fly, gather food and build a nest, and when I see a bird doing these things I rejoice. Goats, hares and wolves are made in order to eat, multiply and feed their families, and when they do this I feel quite

sure that they are happy and that their lives are meaningful. What should a man do? He too must work for his existence, just as the animals do, but with the difference that he will perish if he does it alone, for he must work for an existence, not just for himself, but for everyone. And when he does this I feel quite sure that he is happy and that his life has meaning. And what had I been doing for all those thirty years of conscious life? Far from working for an existence for everyone, I had not even done so for myself. I had lived as a parasite and when I asked myself why I lived, I received the answer: for nothing. If the meaning of human existence lies in working to procure it I had spent thirty years attempting, not to procure it, but to destroy it for myself and for others. How then could I get any answer other than that my life is evil and meaningless? Indeed it was evil and meaningless.

The life of the world runs according to someone's will; our lives and the lives of everything in existence are in someone else's hands. In order to have any chance of comprehending this will we must first fulfil it by doing what is asked of us. If I do not do what is asked of me I will never understand what it is that is asked of me, and still less what is asked of us all, of the whole world.

If a naked, hungry beggar were taken at a crossroads and led to an enclosed part of a splendid establishment where he is given food and drink, and then forced to move some kind of handle up and down, it is obvious that before deciding why it was he had been brought there to move the handle, and whether or not the

establishment was reasonably arranged, the beggar must first move the handle. If he moves the handle he will see that it operates a pump, that the pump draws water and the water flows into the garden. Then he will be taken away from the enclosed place and given another job, and he will gather fruits and will enter into the joy of his lord. As he progresses from lower to higher tasks he will continue to understand more and more about the structure of the establishment and participate in it, and he will never stop to ask why he is there, and he will never come to reproach his master.

Likewise the simple uneducated working people, whom we refer to as the herd, fulfil the will of their master without ever reproaching him. But we, the wise, eat the master's food without doing what he asks of us; instead of doing it we sit around in circles debating whether we should do something as stupid as moving a handle up and down. And then we think it over and decide that either the master is stupid, or that he does not exist and that we are the only intelligent ones. The only thing is, we feel that we are no good for anything and that we must somehow escape from ourselves.

## CHAPTER 12

Having realized the errors in rational knowledge I found it easier to free myself from the temptation of futile theorizing. The conviction that knowledge of the truth can only be found in life stirred me to doubt the worth of my own way of life. The thing that saved me was that I managed to tear myself away from my exclusive existence and see the true life of the simple working people, and realize that this alone is genuine life. I realized that if I wanted to understand life and its meaning I had to live a genuine life and not that of a parasite; and having accepted the meaning that is given to life by that real section of humanity who have become part of that genuine life, I had to try it out.

At this time the following happened to me: over the course of a whole year, almost every minute I asked myself whether I had not better kill myself with a rope or a bullet. And at the same time as I was experiencing the thoughts and observations I have described, my heart was agonized by a tormenting feeling. I can only describe this feeling as a quest for God.

I say that this quest for God was not a debate but an emotion because it did not arise from my stream of thoughts – it was in fact quite contrary to them – but from my heart. It was a feeling of fear, abandonment, loneliness, amid all that was strange to me, and a sense of hope that someone would help me.

Despite the fact that I was utterly convinced of the impossibility of proving the existence of a God (Kant had shown me this and I

had fully understood that it cannot be proven), I nevertheless searched for God in the hope that I might find Him, and reverting to an old habit of prayer, I prayed to Him whom I sought but could not find. In my mind I went over the arguments of Kant and Schopenhauer on the impossibility of proving the existence of God, and I began to refute them. Cause, I told myself, does not belong to the same category of thought as space and time. If I exist then there must be a cause, and a cause of the cause. And the cause of everything is that which we call God. I dwelled on this thought and tried with my whole being to recognize the presence of this cause. And as soon as I recognized that there is a force with power over me I immediately felt the possibility of life. But I asked myself: 'What is this cause, this force? How should I think about it? How should I relate to this thing I call God?' But only the familiar answers came into my head: 'He is the creator, He is omniscient.' The answers did not satisfy me and I felt that I still lacked something inside me that is necessary in order to live. I fell into a state of panic and started to pray to the one whom I sought, in order that He might help me. And the more I prayed the more apparent it became that He did not hear me and that there was really no one to whom I could turn. And with my heart full of grief that there was no one, no God, I cried: 'Lord have mercy on me. Save me! O Lord show me the way!' But no one had mercy on me and I felt that my life had come to an end.

Yet time and again, from different approaches, I kept coming to the same conclusion, that I could not have come into the world

without any cause, reason, or meaning; that I could not be the fledgeling fallen from the nest that I felt myself to be. If I lie on my back crying in the tall grass, like a fledgeling, it is because I know that my mother brought me into the world, kept me warm, fed me and loved me. But where is she, that mother? If I am abandoned, then who has abandoned me? I cannot hide myself from the fact that someone who loved me gave birth to me. Who is this someone? Again, God.

'He knows and He sees my search, my struggle and my grief. He does exist,' I told myself. And I had only to recognize this for an instant and life would rise up within me and I would feel the possibility and joy of living. But again, from the recognition of the existence of God, I moved on to search for my relationship to Him, and again I was presented with that God, our Creator, in three persons, who sent us His son, our Saviour. And again, that God, separated from me and the world, would melt like ice before my eyes, and once more there was nothing left and my flicker of life was extinguished. I fell into despair and felt that there was nothing else I could do except kill myself. And worst of all was that I did not even feel I could do that.

Not two or three, but tens of hundreds of times, my mood suddenly changed from joy and animation to despair and a consciousness of the impossibility of living.

I can remember once in early spring I found myself alone in the woods. I was listening and concentrating my thoughts on the one

thing I had been continuously thinking about over the last three years. Again I was searching for God.

'Fine then,' I said to myself, 'so there is no God, other than something I imagine and the only reality is my own life. There is no God and no miracle can prove that there is because it would only be part of my imagination, and would be irrational.'

'But what about my concept of God, of He whom I seek?' I asked myself, 'Where does this concept come from?' Once again, confronted with these thoughts, joyous waves of life surged up within me. Everything around me came to life and took on meaning. But my joy did not last long. My mind continued its work. 'A concept of God is not God,' I told myself. 'A concept of God is something within me that I can either evoke or not evoke. It is not this that I am seeking. I am seeking that, without which there cannot be life.' Once again everything within and around me began to die, and again I wanted to kill myself.

But then I stopped and looked at myself and at what was going on inside me. I recalled the hundreds of occasions when life had died within me only to be reborn. I remembered that I only lived during those times when I believed in God. Then, as now, I said to myself: I have only to believe in God in order to live. I have only to disbelieve in Him, or to forget Him, in order to die. What are these deaths and rebirths? It is clear that I do not live when I lose belief in God's existence, and I should have killed myself long ago, were it not for a dim hope of finding Him. I live truly only when I

am conscious of Him and seek Him. What then is it you are seeking? a voice exclaimed inside me. There He is! He, without whom it is impossible to live. To know God and to live are one and the same thing. God is life.

'Live in search of God and there will be no life without God!' And more powerfully than ever before everything within and around me came to light, and the light has not deserted me since.

And I was saved from suicide. When and how this change occurred in me I could not say. Just as the life force within me was extinguished gradually and imperceptibly, and I came upon the impossibility of life, the cessation of life and the need for suicide, so too did this life force return to me, gradually and imperceptibly. And, strangely, the life force that returned to me was not a new one but the same old one that had attracted me during the early period of my life. I returned to all those things that had been part of my childhood and youth. I returned to a belief in that will that had given birth to me and which asked something of me. I returned to the idea that the single most important aim of my life is to improve myself, that is, to live according to this will. I returned to the conviction that I could find the manifestation of this will in something that had been hidden from me for a long time, in what humanity had worked out long ago for its own guidance. In other words I returned to a belief in God, in moral perfection, and to that tradition which had given life a meaning. Only the difference

now was that whereas before I had accepted all this unconsciously, I now knew that I could not live without it.

Something like this happened to me: without remembering when I had been put into it, I found myself in a boat that had set off from some unknown shore. The direction to the opposite shore was shown to me, oars were put into my inexperienced hands, and I was left alone. I rowed as best I could and moved forwards, but the further I rowed towards the centre of the stream, the faster the current became that was carrying me directly away from my object, and I kept meeting more oarsmen like myself, who were being carried away by the current. There were lone oarsmen who continued to row; there were some who had discarded their oars; there were large rowing boats and enormous ships full of people, some struggling with the current, others abandoning themselves to it. And as I looked at the flow of those drifting downstream, I found that the more I rowed, the more I forgot the directions that had been given to me. In the very middle of the current, amid the crowd of boats and ships being pulled downstream, I lost my directions and abandoned my oars. From all directions people were being carried downstream by sail and oar, shouting for joy and assuring me and themselves that there could be no other direction. And I believed them and flowed with them. And I was carried a long way, so far that I could hear the noise of the rapids which were bound to shatter me, and I caught sight of boats that were already being smashed against them. Then I came to my senses. For a long time I could not understand what had happened

to me. I saw nothing ahead of me except the destruction towards which I was rushing, but which I feared, and I could see no salvation anywhere, and I did not know what to do. But looking behind me I saw countless boats that could not stop but were defiantly pushing against the current, and I remembered the oars and the direction of the shore, and I began to struggle back against the current, towards the shore.

The shore was God, the direction was tradition, and the oars were the freedom given to me to row towards the shore and unite with God. In this way the force of life rose up within me and I started to live once again.

## CHAPTER 13

I renounced the life of our class, having recognized that it is not life but only a semblance of life, and that the conditions of luxury in which we live deprive us of the possibility of understanding life. I knew that in order to comprehend life I must understand the life not of the minority of those of us who are parasites, but of the simple working people, and of the meaning they give to life. The ordinary working people around me were the Russian people and it was to them that I turned, and to the meaning they give to life. This meaning, if it is possible to describe, is as follows. Every person comes into the world through the will of God. And God created man in such a way that each of us can either destroy his soul or save it. Man's purpose in life is to save his soul; in order to save his soul he must live according to God.

In order to live according to God one must renounce all the comforts of life, work, be humble, suffer and be merciful. This is the meaning the people have derived from all the religious teaching that has been handed down and communicated to them by the pastors, and by the traditions that form part of their lives and are expressed in their legends, sayings and tales, and it was clear to me and close to my heart. But, together with this meaning rooted in the faith of the people, there was much that was inextricably bound to the non-sectarian people among whom I lived, which revolted me and which I found incomprehensible: the sacraments, the church services, the fasts, the bowing before relics

and icons. The people could not separate one thing from another, and neither could I. However strange I found much of what went on in the people's faith, I accepted all of it, attended services, prayed morning and evening, fasted, received communion, and for the first time my reason did not oppose anything. The very thing I had formerly found impossible now provoked no opposition.

My attitude to faith was now quite different from what it had been before. Formerly life had seemed full of meaning, and belief seemed to comprise an arbitrary confirmation of various completely unnecessary and irrational propositions that had nothing to do with life. At that time I asked myself what meaning these propositions could have and, convinced that they had none, I threw them aside. Now, on the contrary, I knew very well that my life has, and could have, no meaning. And not only did the tenets of faith cease to appear unnecessary to me, but I was led by indisputable experience to the conviction that it was only these tenets that can give meaning to life. I had formerly looked upon them as completely irrelevant double Dutch but now, even if I knew that I did not understand them, I knew there was meaning in them, and I told myself that I must learn to understand them. I made the following calculation. I told myself that, as with man and his faculty of reason, knowledge of faith arises from a mysterious source. This source is God, the origin of the human mind and body. Just as my body has succeeded to me from God, so too has my reason and my comprehension of life; therefore the stages in the development of this comprehension cannot be false. Those things

in which people sincerely believe must be the truth. It may be expressed in various ways but it cannot be a lie. Therefore if I think it is a lie, it can only mean that I do not understand it. And I also said to myself: the essence of any faith consists in giving a meaning to life that will not perish with death. Faith must provide answers to the questions of a Tsar dying in the midst of luxury, an old serf worn out by work, an ignorant child, a wise old man, a half-witted old lady, a happy young woman, and a youth racked with passion. And so, if it is to answer to people living in the most differing circumstances of life and of different education, and if there is only one answer to the eternal questions of life – why do I live? what is the purpose of my life? – this answer, although essentially always the same, must be endlessly varied in its manifestation. The more unique, sincere and profound the answer, the more strange and peculiar it will appear in attempts to give it expression, depending on the education and circumstances of each individual. But these debates, while justifying much that was strange to me about the ritualistic aspects of religion, were nevertheless insufficient to enable me to perform acts I felt dubious about, particularly when it came to the faith that had become the sole concern of my life. With all the powers of my being I wished to be in a position whereby I could merge with the people in fulfilling the ritual aspects of their faith; but I could not do it. I felt that I would be lying to myself, and mocking what I considered sacred, if I were to do so. But at this point I was helped by some new Russian theological works.

According to the explanations of these theologians, the basic dogma of faith is the infallibility of the Church. The truth of everything the Church professes follows from this dogma as a necessary conclusion. The Church, as an assembly of believers, united in love and therefore possessing the truth, became the basis of my faith. I told myself that religious truth cannot be attained by one man alone, but only reveals itself to a union of all people, united through love. In order for the truth to be attained there must be no separation; and for there to be no separation we must love and make peace with those who are not in agreement with us. Truth manifests itself as love, and therefore if you do not respect the rituals of the Church you destroy love. And in destroying love you deprive yourself of the possibility of knowing the truth. At the time I did not see the sophistry of this argument. I did not see that unity in love can reveal the greatest love but never the divine truth as expressed in the definitive words of the Nicene Creed. I failed to see that love can never make a given expression of the truth a compulsory condition of unity. At the time I did not see the flaws in the argument, and thanks to it I was able to accept and fulfil all the rites of the Orthodox Church without understanding the majority of them. At the time I tried with my whole soul to avoid any arguments or contradictions, and attempted to explain those doctrines of the Church with which I was in conflict as reasonably as possible.

In fulfilling the church rituals I subdued my reason and submitted myself to a tradition shared by all mankind. I united

myself with my ancestors and loved ones, with my father and mother, and grandfather and grandmother. They and all who came before them had believed and lived, and they had brought me into the world. And I joined those millions whom I so admired. Nor was there anything wrong in these acts in themselves (by wrong I mean the indulgence of desire). As I rose early in the morning to go to church I knew that I was doing something good, if only in that I was sacrificing my bodily comforts in order to subdue my proud mind, for the sake of unity with my ancestors and contemporaries, and of finding the meaning of life. It was the same when I prepared for communion and said my daily prayers, making the sign of the cross and genuflecting, as too when I fasted. However insignificant these sacrifices were, they were made for the sake of something good. I prepared for communion, I fasted and I observed the hours of prayer both at home and in church. While listening to the church services I paused at each word and whenever I could I gave it meaning. In the liturgy the most significant words for me were: ‘Love one another in unity.’ But further on I ignored the words: ‘We believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost’, because I could not understand them.

## CHAPTER 14

At the time it was so essential for me to believe in order to live that I subconsciously hid from myself the contradictions and obscurities in the religious dogma. But there was a limit to the amount of meaning that could be read into the rituals. If the most important words of the Ectene[14] became increasingly clear to me, and even if I somehow managed to interpret the words: 'And remembering Our Sovereign Lady, Holy Mother of God, and all the saints, ourselves and one another, let us all devote our entire life to Christ, Our Lord'; and even if I interpreted the frequent repetition of prayers for the Tsar and his family by the fact that they are more exposed to temptation than others, and therefore in greater need of prayer, and the prayers for the subjugation of our enemies and adversaries by saying that they are evil, nevertheless these prayers and others, such as the Hymn of the Cherubim, the Chosen Warriors, as well as the whole sacrament of the Eucharist, in fact nearly two thirds of the service, if not all of it, had no meaning or made me feel that in giving it meaning I was lying and thereby destroying my relation to God and losing all possibility of faith.

I experienced the same thing over the celebration of the major feasts. I could understand the law of observing the Sabbath, in other words devoting one day to God. But the most important feast was in memory of the Resurrection, the reality of which I could neither imagine nor understand. And the name 'Resurrection' was

also given to the weekly feast day.[15] On this day the sacrament of the Eucharist was performed, which I found quite incomprehensible. All the other twelve feast days, except for Christmas, were in memory of miracles – things which I endeavoured not to think about, in order not to deny them: the Ascension, Pentecost, the Epiphany, the Intercession of the Virgin, and so on. At the celebration of these festivals, feeling that an importance had been ascribed to things I considered to be of little importance, I either invented something that would suffice as an explanation, or closed my eyes so that I would not see the things that tempted me.

This happened to me more powerfully than ever when I participated in what are the most usual, and regarded as the most important, sacraments: Baptism and Communion. Here I did not come into conflict with something incomprehensible but with fully comprehensible acts; it seemed to me that these acts were seductive and I found myself in a dilemma – either I rejected them, or I lied about them.

I shall never forget the tormenting feeling that I experienced on the day I received communion for the first time in many years. The service, the priest, the rules of prayer,[16] were all something I could understand, and created in me a joyful realization that the meaning of life was being revealed. The communion itself I interpreted as an act performed in memory of Christ, signifying the purification of sin and the full acceptance of Christ's teachings.

If this explanation was artificial I failed to notice its falsity. As I bowed down and humbled myself before the confessor, a simple, timid priest, I felt so happy to be shaking loose all the dirt in my soul, repenting all my sins, so happy to be united in thought with the aspirations of the Fathers who had written the prayers of the office, so happy to be united with all those who have and who do believe, that I failed to notice the artificiality of my interpretations. But when I approached the Royal Doors and the priest asked me to repeat what I believe, and that what I was about to receive was actually the body and blood, my heart contracted; it was more than a false note, it was a cruel demand made by someone who evidently had never known what faith is.

I can now permit myself to say that it was a cruel demand, but at the time I did not think so; it was just horribly painful to me. I was no longer in the position I had been in during my youth, when I thought that everything in life was lucid. I had come to faith because apart from it I had found nothing, absolutely nothing, other than destruction; it was therefore impossible to give up the faith, and so I submitted. I discovered in my soul a feeling that helped me to endure it. It was a sense of self-abasement and humility. I humbled myself and swallowed the body and blood without feeling any sense of blasphemy, and with the desire to believe; but the blow had already struck. Knowing in advance what awaited me I could not do it a second time.

I nevertheless continued to perform the church rituals, and I still believed that the truth lay in the dogma I was following. Then something happened to me which is clear to me now, but which struck me as strange at the time.

I was listening to the conversation of an illiterate peasant, a pilgrim, speaking about God, religion, life and salvation when a knowledge of faith was opened up to me. I drew closer to the people and, as I listened to their debates on life and religion, I found myself coming closer and closer to an understanding of the truth. The same thing happened to me when I read the Lives of the Martyrs and the Prologues,[17] which became my favourite reading. Disregarding the miracles and thinking of them as fables expressing ideas, this reading revealed to me the meaning of life. There were the lives of Macarius the Great,[18] Joseph the Prince (the story of Buddha), the writings of John Chrysostom,[19] the story of the traveller in the well, of the monk who found gold, of Peter the Publican and the histories of the martyrs, all of whom proclaimed that death does not obliterate life; and there were the tales of illiterate and stupid men who found salvation, although they knew nothing about the teachings of the Church.

But I had only to mix in the company of learned believers, or to borrow their books, and vague feelings of doubt, dissatisfaction and exasperation with their arguments would rise up within me, and I felt that the further I penetrated their discourses, the further I distanced myself from the truth and headed for despair.

## CHAPTER 15

I so often envied the peasants their illiteracy and lack of learning. They found nothing false in those doctrinal statements which seemed apparent rubbish to me. They could accept them and believe in the truth, in the same truth that I believed in. Only for me, wretched fellow, it was obvious that the truth was interwoven with fine threads of falsehood, and that I could not accept it as such.

Thus I lived for about three years and in the early days when, like one possessed, I was gradually acquiring the truth, scenting out the direction that seemed the clearest, these details struck me less. When I failed to understand something I told myself: 'I am guilty, I am a fool.' But the more I became infused with the truths I was studying, the more they became the basis of my life, the more burdensome and irritating these obstacles became, and the sharper the division between what I did not understand and what I could never understand except by lying to myself.

Despite the doubts and sufferings I still clung to the Orthodox Church. But questions of life that had to be resolved kept rising to the surface, and the Church's ruling on these issues – contrary to the very foundations of faith by which I lived – finally obliged me to renounce the possibility of communion with Orthodoxy. First and foremost these issues concerned the attitude of the Orthodox Church to other Churches, to the Catholics and the so-called Raskolniks.[20] At the time, as a result of my interest in religion, I

had come into contact with believers of various denominations: Catholics, Protestants, Old Believers,[21] Molokans,[22] and others. Among them I met many deeply moral men with sincere belief. I wished to be a brother to these people. And what happened? The teaching which had promised me unity of all through one faith and through love, that very teaching, speaking through its highest representatives, told me that all these people were living a lie, that the thing which gave them strength of life was a temptation of the devil, and that it is we alone who are in possession of the only possible truth. And I saw that the Orthodox Church regarded as heretics all those who did not profess an identical faith to theirs, just as the Catholics and the others consider the Orthodox followers to be heretics. And I saw that the Orthodox, although they may try to hide it, regard with hostility all those who do not practise their faith by using the same external symbols and words as themselves. And this could not be otherwise, first of all because the assertion that you live in falsehood and I in truth is the most cruel thing that one man can say to another and secondly, because a man who loves his children and his brothers cannot help feeling hostile towards those who want to convert his children and his brothers to a false belief. And this hostility increases in proportion to one's knowledge of theology. And assuming that truth lies in union by love, I was struck by the fact that theology was destroying the thing it should be advancing.

The temptation is obvious to educated men like ourselves who live in countries where a variety of different faiths are practised

and who have seen the contemptuous, self-righteous, invincible manner of rejection with which the Catholics behave towards the Orthodox and the Protestants, and the Orthodox towards the Catholics and Protestants, and the Protestants towards them both. And there is such a similar attitude between the Old Believers, Russian Evangelists, Shakers[23] and all the other religions, that the very obviousness of the temptation initially perplexed me. I told myself: no, it cannot be so simple. Surely if men fail to see that if their two convictions contradict each other, then neither of them possesses the sole truth that constitutes faith. There is something else here, there must be an explanation. I felt sure there was and I searched for the explanation, reading everything I could on the subject and consulting everyone I could. But I received no explanation other than the one according to which the Sumsky Hussars consider themselves to be the finest regiment in the world, while the Yellow Uhlans consider that they are the best regiment in the world. The ecclesiastics of all the different religious denominations, through their finest representatives, could tell me nothing except that they believed themselves to be in possession of the truth whilst others had strayed from it and that all they could do was to pray for them. I visited archimandrites, bishops, elder monks and monks of the strictest orders, yet none of them made any attempt to elucidate the matter for me. Only one explained it to me, but in such a way that I never asked anyone again.

I have already said that for every non-believer who returns to the faith (and this could include all of our younger generation), the

question that first presents itself is: why is the truth not to be found in Lutheranism, or Catholicism, but only in the Orthodox faith? Someone who has been educated at secondary school cannot help knowing what the peasant does not know – namely, that the Protestants and Catholics are equally convinced of the singular truth of their faiths. Historical evidence, twisted by each religion to suit its own purpose, is insufficient. Is it not possible, as I have suggested, to understand the teachings in a superior way, so that from an elevated level the differences might disappear, as they do for people who genuinely believe? Is it not possible to go further along that path which we are following with the Old Believers? They stress the fact that their cross, their allelujahs, and their way of processing around the altar differ from ours. We say: you believe in the Nicene Creed and in the seven sacraments, and so do we. Let us keep to that and for the rest you may do as you please. Thus we have united with them by placing the essential aspects of faith above the non-essential. Is it not possible to say to the Catholics: you believe in such and such and so and so, which are the important things, as for the issue of the filoque[24] and the Pope, you may do as you please. And can we not say the same to the Protestants and unite with them in the more important issues? My interlocutor agreed with my ideas, but told me that such concessions would provoke criticism from the spiritual authorities in that it suggests a departure from the faith of our ancestors and would lead to a schism, and that the vocation of the clergy is to

safeguard, in all its purity, the Greek Orthodox faith that has been handed down by our forefathers.

Then I understood it all. While I am seeking faith, the force of life, they are seeking the best way of fulfilling, in the eyes of men, certain human obligations. And in fulfilling these human affairs they perform them in a human fashion. However much they might speak about their compassion for their lost brethren, or of their prayers for those who stand before the throne of the Almighty, it has always been necessary to use force in carrying out human duties. Just as it has always been applied, so it is now, and always will be. If two religions each consider that they hold the truth and the other a lie, then in order to convert their brothers to the truth they will each preach their own doctrines. And if a false doctrine is taught to the inexperienced sons of the Church which holds the truth, then that Church will have no choice other than to burn the books and banish the person who is leading his sons into temptation. What can be done with a sectarian who, in the eyes of the Orthodox Church, is ablaze with the fire of false doctrine, and who is misleading the sons of the Church in the most important matter of life, in faith? What can be done with him other than chop off his head or imprison him? Under the Tsar, Alexis Mikhailovitch,[25] they were burned at the stake; in other words, the severest method of punishment of the time was enforced. In our day too the severest method of punishment is enforced: imprisonment in solitary confinement. As I turned my attention to what is done in the name of religion I was horrified and very

nearly repudiated Orthodoxy. A further thing was the Church's attitude to life with regard to war and executions.

At the time Russia was at war.[26] And, in the name of Christian love, Russians were killing their fellow men. It was impossible not to think about this. It was impossible to avoid the fact that killing is evil and contrary to the most basic principles of any faith. And yet prayers were said in the churches for the success of our armies, and our religious teachers acknowledged this killing as an outcome of faith. And this was not only applied to murder in time of war, but, during the troubled times that followed the war, I witnessed members of the Church, her teachers, monks, and ascetics condoning the killing of helpless, lost youths. As I turned my attention to all that is done by people who profess Christianity, I was horrified.

## CHAPTER 16

I no longer had any doubts and was fully convinced that not all the teachings of the faith I had joined were true. Whereas before I used to say that all religious teaching is a lie, I no longer found it possible to say this. There could be no doubt that the people as a whole had a knowledge of the truth, otherwise they would not be here. Moreover, this knowledge of the truth was now accessible to me; I had already lived by it and felt its validity. But there was falsehood in it as well, of this I had no doubt. All that had hitherto repelled me now stood vividly before me. Although I could see that the mixture of lies I so loathed was less apparent among the peasants than among the representatives of the Church, I could nevertheless see that even in the people's faith there was falsehood mixed with the truth.

But where did the falsehood come from, and where did the truth come from? Both had been passed down by what is called the Church. But falsehood and truth are contained in tradition, in the so-called holy tradition and in the Scriptures.

Whether I liked it or not, I was led to study and examine these writings and traditions – an examination that until now I had been very fearful of.

I turned to a study of that very theology I had once so contemptuously rejected as unnecessary. It had previously struck me as a collection of useless nonsense, this at a time when I had been surrounded by manifestations of life that I thought clear and

full of meaning. Now I would have been glad to discard all those things that did not enhance health of mind, but I did not know what to do with myself. The one meaning of life that had been revealed to me rests on this religious doctrine, or is at least inseparably connected. However far-fetched it might seem to my old, infirm mind, it was the only hope of salvation. It must be carefully and attentively examined in order to be understood, even if it is not understood in the way I understand the propositions of science. I do not seek that, nor can I, since I know the unusual nature of religious knowledge. I shall not seek the explanation of everything. I know that the explanation of all things, like the origin of all things, must remain a secret of eternity. But I want to understand in such a way as to be brought to the inevitably inexplicable. I want to realize that all that is inexplicable is so, not because the demands of my intellect are at fault (they are correct and apart from them I can understand nothing), but because I can recognize the limits of my intellect. I want to understand in such a way that everything inexplicable presents itself to me as being necessarily inexplicable and not as being something that I am under an obligation to believe.

I have no doubt that there is truth in the teachings, but I also have no doubt that there is falsehood in them too, and that I must discover what is true and what is false and separate one from the other. This is what I have set out to do. That which I found false in the teachings, and that which I found true, and the conclusions I came to comprise the following section of this essay, which, if

someone should consider it worthwhile and useful to people, will probably be published some day, somewhere.[27]

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I wrote the above three years ago.

The other day, while I was re-reading this printed section and returning to the train of thoughts and feelings that were inside me when I was experiencing all this, I had a dream. This dream expressed for me, in condensed form, all that I had lived through and described, therefore I think that for those who have understood me a description of the dream will refresh, clarify and unify all that has been related at such length in these pages. Here is the dream: I see that I am lying on a bed. I am neither comfortable, nor uncomfortable. I am lying on my back. But I start to think about whether or not I am comfortable and it seems to me that my legs are a bit awkward; I do not know whether it is that they are too short or that they are uneven. I shift my legs and at the same time I begin to think about the way I am lying and what I am lying on, things which had not entered my head until now. And looking at my bed I see that I am lying on some plaited rope supports that are attached to the sides of the bed. My feet are resting on one of the supports, my calves on another and my legs are uncomfortable. I somehow know that these supports can be moved. Moving one of my legs I push away the furthest support beneath my feet. I presume that this will be better. But I have pushed it too far and

want to rescue it with my legs, and this movement causes yet another support, beneath my calves, to fall off and my calves are left dangling. I move my whole body in order to adjust my position and am quite certain that this will settle the matter. But with this movement still more of the supports slip and move away beneath me and I can see that things are getting worse: the whole lower part of my body is slipping and hanging down, and my feet do not reach the ground. I am only supported on the upper half of my back and I start to feel not just uncomfortable but terrified of something. Only at this point do I ask myself the thing that has not yet entered my head. I ask myself: where am I and what am I lying on? I begin looking around and before anywhere else I look beneath me, where my body is dangling and in the direction where I feel I am bound to fall very soon. I look below, and I cannot believe my eyes. I am at a height not just of, say, an extremely tall tower or mountain, but I am at a height such as I could never have imagined.

I cannot even discern whether I can see anything there below, in the bottomless abyss over which I am hanging and into which I am being drawn. My heart contracts and I feel terrified. It is dreadful to look down there. I feel that if I look down I will immediately slip from the last support and perish. I do not look, but not looking is still worse because I am thinking about what is going to happen to me when I slip from the last support. And I feel that I am losing my last bit of strength through terror, and that my back is slowly slipping lower and lower. Another moment and I

will fall off. And then I have a thought: perhaps it is not real. It is a dream. I will wake up. I try to wake up and cannot. ‘What can I do, what can I do?’ I ask myself, looking upwards. Above there is also an abyss. I look into this abyss of sky and try to forget about the abyss below, and I do in fact forget it. The infinity below repels and frightens me; the infinity above attracts and reassures me. Thus I am hanging over the abyss, held up by the last of the supports that has not yet slipped out from under me; I know that I am dangling but I only look upwards and my fear passes away. As happens in a dream, a voice says: ‘Take note of this, this is it!’ I look further and further into the infinity above me and feel myself growing calmer. I remember everything that has happened and how it happened: how I shifted the position of my legs, how I was dangling there, how terrified I felt, and how I was saved from my terror by looking upwards. And I asked myself: ‘Am I not still dangling there?’ And I do not look around so much as feel with my whole body the edge of the support by which I am held up. I see that I am no longer dangling or falling but am firmly supported. I ask myself how I am being supported: I grope about, look around and see that beneath me, under the middle of my body, there is a single support and when I look up I am lying on it in a position of secure balance, and that it alone gave me support before. And then, as happens in dreams, the mechanism by which I am supported seems to me to be a very natural, comprehensible and sure thing, although when awake it makes no sense at all. I am even surprised, in my sleep, that I had not understood this before.

It appears that there is a pillar at my head and the solidity of this slender pillar is beyond doubt, although there is nothing for it to stand on. A rope is hanging very ingeniously, yet simply, from the pillar, and if one lies with the middle of one's body on the rope and looks up there can be no question of falling. This was all clear to me and I was glad and tranquil. It was as if someone were saying to me: 'See that you remember.' And I woke up.

# WHAT IS RELIGION AND OF WHAT DOES ITS ESSENCE CONSIST?

## CHAPTER 1

During certain periods in the existence of all human societies, a time has come when religion has first strayed from its basic meaning, and then digressed further and further until it has lost track of this meaning and eventually ossified in the already established forms, at which point it has come to have less and less influence on people's lives.

At these times the educated minority, no longer believing in the existing religious teaching, simply pretend to believe in it because they find it necessary for the purpose of holding the masses to the established order of life. Although the masses might cling to the established religious forms through inertia, their lives are no longer guided by religious demands, but simply by popular custom and state regulations.

This has occurred many times in various human societies. But what is happening today in our Christian society has never happened before. Never before have the educated minority, those with the most influence on the masses, not only had no belief in the existing religion, but seemed convinced that today's world no longer has any need of one. Rather than persuading those who doubt the truth of the professed religion that there is a more

rational and lucid doctrine than the existing one, they persuade them that on the whole religion has outlived itself and become not just useless, but a harmful organ of social life, like the caecum in the human body. These sorts of people do not understand religion as something known to us through inner experience, but as an external phenomenon, like an illness, that happens to overwhelm certain people, and which we can only investigate through external symptoms.

In the opinion of some of these people, religion originated from attributing a spirit to all the phenomena of nature (animism); in the opinion of others, from the supposition that it is possible to communicate with our deceased ancestors; and in a third opinion, through fear before the forces of nature.

And so the learned people of our time argue further that since science has proved that wood and stone cannot be animated, that deceased ancestors can no longer experience what the living are doing, and that natural phenomena can be explained by natural causes, the necessity for religion is obviated, together with all those constraints that have hampered people as a result of religious beliefs. In the opinion of these learned people there has been a period of ignorance: the religious period which humanity outlived long ago leaving occasional atavistic indications of its existence. Then followed a metaphysical period, and this has been outlived. Today we, enlightened people, are living in a scientific period, a period of positive science which will replace religion and

lead humanity to a height of development which was unattainable while it was subordinated to superstitious religious teachings.

At the beginning of the year 1901, the renowned French scholar Berthelot[28] delivered a speech in which he informed his audience that the age of religion has passed and that it must now be replaced by science. I refer to this speech because it was the first to fall into my hands and because it was delivered in the capital of the educated world by a person whom everyone recognizes to be a scholar. The same thought is constantly expressed everywhere, from philosophical treatises to newspaper feuilletons. In his speech Mr Berthelot says that formerly there were two principles motivating human society: force and religion. Today these principles have become superfluous because *science* has replaced them. By the word science, Mr Berthelot evidently means, like all who believe in science, a science that embraces every aspect of human knowledge, harmoniously united, assessed according to its degree of importance and in command of such methods that the data obtained is indisputably true. But since there is really no such science, and what is referred to as science is a collection of incidental, totally disconnected items of knowledge which are often completely useless, and not only fail to present the indisputable truth but very often present the most crude delusions, displayed as the truth today and refuted tomorrow, it is obvious that the thing which Mr Berthelot claims must replace religion does not exist. Therefore when Mr Berthelot and those in agreement with him say that science will replace religion, their assertion is

entirely arbitrary and based on a completely unjustified belief in the infallibility of science, a belief quite similar to faith in the infallibility of the Church. Moreover, those considered and referred to as learned are quite convinced that a science already exists which should and can replace religion and which has already obviated the need for it.

'Religion is obsolete; to believe in anything other than science is ignorance. Science will arrange all we need and we need only science to guide us through life.' This is what the scientists themselves say, as also do those members of the crowd who, despite being quite unscientific, trust the scientists and share their conviction that religion is an outlived superstition and that we need only science to guide us in life: in other words that we need absolutely nothing because science, by virtue of its very aim of investigating all that exists, can give no guidance to human life.

## CHAPTER 2

The learned men of today have decided that religion is not necessary and that it will be replaced by science, or already has been. Yet it remains the case that today, just as before, not a single human society, or rational being, has lived, or can live without religion. (I say *rational* person because an irrational one may live without religion, just as an animal does.) A rational being cannot live without religion because it is only this that gives him the essential guidance as to what to do first and what follows. Precisely because religion is inherent to his nature the rational man cannot live without it. Every animal is guided in its behaviour by consideration of the immediate results of his actions (other than that to which he is impelled by the straightforward need of satisfying his desires). Having considered these consequences, by means of those faculties of comprehension in its possession, an animal makes his actions conform to them and always, unhesitatingly, behaves in the same way, i.e. in accord with these considerations. Thus, for example, a bee flies after honey and brings it back to its hive, because in winter it must have a supply of food for itself and for its young, and beyond this it knows nothing and can do nothing. A bird behaves in the same way when it builds a nest, or when it emigrates from North to South. All animals act in this way when they do something that does not result from direct, immediate need, but are stimulated by considerations of anticipated consequences. But this is not so with

men. The difference between man and the animals is that an animal's cognitive faculties are restricted to what we call instinct, while man's basic cognitive faculty is his reason. The bee gathering his food can have no doubt as to whether or not he is doing something that is good or bad. But a man reaping the harvest, or gathering fruit, cannot help wondering whether he is undermining the growth of future crops, or whether he is depriving his neighbours of food. Nor can he help thinking about what will happen to the children he is feeding, and much else besides. The more important questions of conduct in life cannot be conclusively resolved by a rational person precisely because there is an abundance of consequences of which he is inevitably aware. Rational man, even if he does not know, then feels that in the more important questions of life he cannot be guided by personal impulses, nor by a consideration of the immediate consequences of his actions. He can see that they are too diverse and often contradictory, as, for instance, those that are just as likely to be harmful as to be beneficial to himself and others. There is a legend about an angel who came down to earth and entered a God-fearing family where he murdered a child in its cradle. When asked why he had done it he explained that the child would have become the greatest of villains and caused the family unhappiness. This is so not only with questions as to what sort of human life is desirable and what useless or harmful. None of the important questions in life can be resolved by a rational person through considerations of the immediate results and consequences. He cannot be satisfied by

the same things that guide an animal's behaviour. Man may regard himself as an animal living among animals, by the day, or he may think of himself as a member of a family, or society, or a nation that lives for centuries. Or he may find himself obliged (because his reason drives him irresistibly to it) to regard himself as a part of an infinite universe, living in infinite time. And, therefore, in respect of the infinitely small phenomena of life that influence his behaviour, a rational person must do what in mathematics is called integration: that is, establish a relation to the immediate issues of life, a relation to the entire infinite universe in time and space, conceiving of it as a whole. And the relationship established by man to that whole, of which he feels himself a part and from which he draws guidance for his behaviour, is that which has been, and is called religion. And therefore religion has always been, and cannot cease to be, an essential and indisposable condition of the life of rational humanity.

## CHAPTER 3

This is how religion has always been understood by people who do not lack the faculty of higher (i.e. religious) consciousness, which distinguishes man from the animals. The oldest and most common definition of the word religion (*religare,* to bind) runs as follows: *religion is the bond between man and God.* 'Les obligations de l'homme envers Dieu voilà la religion,' says Vauvenargues.[29] Schleiermacher[30] and Feuerbach[31] attribute a similar meaning to religion when they acknowledge that *the basis of religion is man's consciousness of his dependence on God.* 'La religion est une affaire entre chaque homme et Dieu' (Bayle).[32] 'La religion est la résultat des besoins de l'âme et des effets de l'intelligence' (B. Constant).[33]

'Religion is a certain method by which man recognizes his relationship to the superhuman and mysterious forces on which he regards himself dependent' (Goblet d'Alviella).[34] 'Religion is a definition of human life based on the bond between the human spirit and those mysterious spirits whose dominion over the world and over himself is recognized by man, and with which he feels himself united' (A. Reville).[35]

Thus the essence of religion has been, and still is, understood by people with the highest human faculty, as the establishing by man of a relationship with the infinite Being, or beings, whose power he feels over him. No matter how this relationship has varied, for different peoples and at different times, it has always defined man's destiny in the world, from which guidance for conduct

followed naturally. The Jew has understood his relationship to the infinite as follows: being a member of the nation God chose from among all nations, he must therefore observe in God's eyes the agreement He has entered into with his people. The Greek understood his relationship as follows: being dependent on the representatives of eternity – the gods – he ought to please them. The Brahmin has understood his relationship to the infinite Brahma in this way: he is a manifestation of this Brahma and ought, by renouncing life, to strive after unity with the Higher Being. The Buddhist has understood, and understands, his relationship with the infinite thus: in passing from one form of life to another, he inevitably suffers. This suffering originates from passions and desires, therefore he ought to try and nullify them, and make the transition to Nirvana. Every religion is the establishment of a relationship between man and the infinite Being of which he feels he is a part, and from which he derives guidance in his conduct. If therefore a religion fails to establish this relationship, as for instance in idolatry, or sorcery, then it is not a religion, but merely a degeneration of one. Even if a religion establishes a relationship between man and God, but does so through affirmations which are so contrary to the level of knowledge people have reached that they cannot believe in them, then neither is this a religion, but merely a semblance of one. Again, if it does not bind man to the infinite being, it is not a religion. Neither is a belief in propositions which give man no definite guidance in his conduct. It is similarly impossible to give the name religion to Comte's[36] positivism, since

it only establishes a relationship between man and mankind, not with the infinite. This relationship leads quite arbitrarily to Comte's morals, which despite making very high demands are unfounded. The most educated Comtist finds himself in a religious relationship that is incomparably lower than that of a simple person who believes in God, whatever the god, as long as it is infinite, and whose behaviour is derived from this faith. The Comtist's argument about the 'grand être' does not constitute belief in God and cannot replace it.

'*True religion is that relationship, in accordance with reason and knowledge, which man establishes with the infinite world around him, and which binds his life to that infinity and guides his actions.*'

## CHAPTER 4

Despite the fact that at no time and in no place have people ever lived without religion, the learned people of today say, like Molière's 'involuntary doctor' who assured us that the liver is on the left side, that 'nous avons changé tout cela', and we can and must live without religion. But, as always, religion remains the chief motivator and heart of human societies. Without it, as without a heart, there cannot be rational life. Today, as in the past, there are a number of different religions, because the expression of man's relationship to the infinite, to God or the Gods, varies according to the times and according to the level of development of different peoples. However, since the appearance of rational man there has not been one human society that could live or has lived without religion.

It is true that there have been and still are periods in the life of nations when the existing religion has become so distorted and remote from life that it no longer guides it. But this interruption of religious influence on people's lives, occurring at certain times in all religions, has always been temporary. Religion, like all that lives, has the characteristics of birth, development, ageing, death and rebirth – rebirth in forms that are ever more perfect than the previous ones. After a period of heightened development religion always enters into a period of decline and death, which is usually followed by a period of regeneration and the formation of religious doctrine that is more rational and lucid than before. These periods

of development, death and rebirth have always occurred in all religions. As soon as the profound religion of Brahmanism began to grow old and fossilize in rigid, coarse forms deviating from the original meaning, there appeared on the one hand a rebirth of Brahmanism, and on the other the elevated doctrine of Buddhism, which advanced humanity's understanding of its relationship to the infinite. The same kind of decline occurred in the Greek and Roman religions, with Christianity appearing after the lowest ebb of the decline had been reached. The same happened with Church Christianity in Byzantium, which degenerated into idolatory and polytheism. To counteract this distortion there appeared on the one side the Paulicians, and on the other, strict Mohammedanism with its fundamental teaching of the one God, as opposed to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Virgin Mother. The same happened with Papal Christianity during the Middle Ages, leading to the Reformation. Thus, these periods when there is a decline in the religious influence on the majority are an essential condition of the life and development of all religious teachings. The reason they occur is because no matter how unsophisticated it may be, every religion in its true meaning always establishes a relationship between man and the infinite, which is one and the same for all people. In all faiths man is regarded as equally insignificant before the infinite; they therefore all include the concept of equality between men in the eyes of what is called God, whether it be lightning, the wind, a tree, an animal, a hero or a King (living or dead), as occurred in Rome. The acceptance of equality between

all men is a necessary and fundamental characteristic of all religions. Since in no place, and at no time, has this equality ever existed in reality, nor will it ever, what has happened is that as soon as a new religious teaching appeared (including as always a recognition of equality between all men) those for whom inequality was more advantageous have immediately tried to conceal this basic feature, thereby misconstruing the actual doctrine. This has always and everywhere happened whenever a new religious teaching has appeared. On the whole it has been done unconsciously, because those for whom inequality is advantageous, the rulers and the rich, have tried to justify themselves in the eyes of the new religious teaching without having to alter their own position by using every possible means to instil a meaning into the doctrine that admits inequality. This distortion of religion in such a way as to enable those who rule over others to feel justified in doing so, when passed on to the masses naturally gave them the idea that their submission to their masters was demanded by the religion they professed.

## CHAPTER 5

All human activity is actuated by three motive causes: feeling, reason and suggestion – the characteristic doctors call hypnotism. At times a person acts under the influence of feeling alone, seeking to achieve what he desires. At times he acts under the influence of his reason alone, which indicates what he ought to do. At other times, and more frequently, he acts because he himself, or others, have suggested a certain action and he unconsciously submits to the suggestion. Under normal conditions of life all three motive forces take part in influencing a person's behaviour. Feeling impels him to a certain action, reason tests the conformity of this action against the surrounding circumstances, and against the past and anticipated future, and suggestion urges him to complete, without thought or feeling, those actions evoked by feeling and condoned by reason. A person would not undertake to do anything without feeling. Without reason he would quickly yield to a number of feelings that are contradictory and harmful to himself and others. Without the ability to submit to suggestion (one's own or others'), a person would constantly experience the feeling arousing him to a certain action, and would continually concentrate his reason on verifying the expediency of this feeling. Therefore all three motive causes are vital to every most simple human action. If a person walks from one place to another it is because feeling prompted him to make the transfer, reason sanctioned the intention and dictated the means of doing it (in this instance, walking along a

particular road), so that his muscles obey and he walks along the prescribed road. As he walks, both his feeling and his reason are released for the next action, which would not happen without the capacity to submit to suggestion. This happens in all human activity, including the most important one: religious activity. Feeling evokes the need to establish a relationship between man and God, reason defines this relationship and suggestion leads a person towards behaviour that follows from this relationship. But this only happens as long as religion does not undergo distortion. As soon as distortion begins, suggestion becomes stronger and stronger and the activities of feeling and reason weaken. The methods of suggestion are always and everywhere the same. They consist in making use of man's state of mind at a time when he is most susceptible to suggestion, such as in childhood, or at important moments such as birth, death, or marriage. The person is first influenced through works of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, drama, and then in this state of suggestibility (similar to that provoked in certain people when they are half asleep) instilled with whatever it is the persuader wishes.

This occurrence can be seen in all the old religious teachings: in the lofty teachings of Brahmanism, as they degenerated into a primitive worship of countless images in various temples, to the accompaniment of singing and incense burning, in the Jewish religion preached by the prophets and reduced to the worship of God in grandiose temples, together with majestic songs and processions, in the elevated form of Buddhism which was reduced,

together with its monasteries, images of Buddha and numerous exultant rituals, to mysterious Laminism, and also in Taoism with its witchcraft and incantations.

Whenever any religious teaching has started becoming distorted its guardians, having already brought people to a state of weakened rational activity, have then employed every means of persuading them of what they wanted. In all faiths it has been necessary to persuade them of the same three tenets which lie at the basis of all the perversions that have corrupted ageing religions. Firstly, that there are special people who alone can act as intermediaries between man and God, or the Gods; secondly, that miracles have been, and are being, performed which prove and confirm the truth of what the intermediaries say; and thirdly that there are certain words repeated orally or written in books which express the unwavering will of God, or the Gods, and which are sacred and infallible. As soon as these propositions are accepted, under hypnotic influence, everything said by these intermediaries is recognized as the holy truth, and then the chief purpose of the religious perversion is accomplished. This purpose is not only to conceal the law of human equality, but to construe and affirm the highest inequality: the division of castes, the distinction between people and goys, Orthodox and heretic, holy and sinful. The same division has always occurred in Christianity: complete inequality between men has been accepted, as well as division, not just according to their understanding of the doctrines into lay and cleric, but according to social status into those with power and

those who must submit, which the teaching of St Paul acknowledges as ordained by God.

## CHAPTER 6

Inequality between people, not just between lay and clergy, but between rich and poor, and masters and slaves, was established by the Church Christian religion in the same clear cut manner as in other religions. And yet, judging by what we know of the original conditions of Christianity from the teachings expressed in the Gospels, it would appear that the chief methods of distortion used by other religions had been foreseen and that warnings against them had been clearly stated. It was straightforwardly said against the priestly caste that none could be the teacher of another ('Do not call yourselves fathers and teachers'). Against the attribution of sacred knowledge to books it was said that what is important is the spirit and not the letter, that man ought not to believe in human traditions, and that all the laws and the Prophets, that is all those books in which the writing is considered sacred, lead only to the fact that we should do to others as we would wish them to do to us. If nothing is said against miracles, and if in the Gospels themselves there are descriptions of miracles presented as if performed by Jesus, it is nevertheless evident from the whole spirit of the teaching that the validity of Christ's doctrine is not based on miracles, but on the actual teaching ('Whosoever wishes to know if my teaching is true, let him do as I say'). The most important thing is that Christianity proclaims the equality of all men, no longer merely as a basic teaching of universal brotherhood, but because all men are recognized as being sons of God. It would therefore

seem impossible to twist Christianity in such a way as to destroy the awareness of equality between all men.

But human intelligence is shrewd, and whether it was done unconsciously or semi-consciously, an entirely new method was devised (a 'truc' as the French say) in order to make the warnings in the Gospels and the clearly proclaimed equality between men inoperative. This 'truc' consisted in attributing infallibility not only to certain words, but to a certain group of people called the 'Church', who had a right to pass this infallibility on to people selected by themselves.

A slight addition to the Gospels was invented saying that when He departed for heaven, Christ handed certain people the exclusive right not just of instructing people in the sacred truth (according to the Gospel texts he handed over at the same time a right, seldom used, of being invulnerable to snakes, poisons and fire), but of saving and condemning people, and more importantly of conferring this power on others. As a result, as soon as the idea of the Church was firmly established all the Gospel proposals for hindering the distortion of Christ's teaching became inoperative, for the Church was superior to both reason and to the writings considered sacred. Reason was acknowledged as the source of all error and the Gospels were not interpreted in the light of common-sense, but merely as those who constituted the Church wished.

And thus, all the three previous methods of religious distortion – priesthood, miracles, and the infallibility of the Scriptures – were

adopted wholeheartedly by Christianity. It was admitted as lawful to have intermediaries between God and man, because the Church recognized them as such. The reality of miracles was admitted because they bore witness to the infallibility of the Church, and the sanctity of the Bible was agreed because it was acknowledged by the Church.

Christianity was perverted in the same way as all the other religions with the single difference that precisely because Christianity voiced its fundamental doctrine of equality between all men with such clarity, it was necessary to use special force to distort the teaching and conceal its basic clause. With the help of the concept of a Church this was done to a greater extent than in any other religion. Indeed no other faith has ever preached things so incompatible with reason and contemporary knowledge, or ideas so immoral as those taught by Church Christianity. This is without mentioning all the nonsense in the Old Testament, such as the creation of light before the sun, the creation of the world six thousand years ago, the housing of all the animals in the ark, and all the various immoral atrocities such as the order to murder children and entire populations at God's command. Nor have we mentioned the absurdity of the sacrament of which Voltaire said that there have been and are a great many absurd religious teachings, but never before was there one in which the main religious act consists in eating your own God. And what can be more ridiculous than saying that Our Lady was both mother and virgin, or that the heavens opened up and a voice rang forth, or

that Christ flew up to heaven and is seated up there somewhere, at the right hand of His father, or that God is three persons in one, not three gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva,[37] but three combined in one. There can be nothing as immoral as those dreadful teachings according to which an angry and vengeful God punishes everyone for the sin of Adam, or that he sent his son to earth to save us, knowing beforehand that men would murder him and be damned for it. Again it is absurd to suggest that man's salvation from sin lies in baptism, or in believing that all these things actually happened, and that the son of God was killed in order to save people and that those who do not believe it will be punished by God with eternal torment. And so, putting aside those things some people consider to be additions to the essential religious dogma, such as faith in certain relics or icons of the Virgin Mary, prayers of supplication, addresses to various saints according to their speciality, or the Protestant doctrine of predestination, even so the very premises of this religion, accepted by all and formulated in the Nicene Creed, are so ridiculous and immoral, and so contradictory to healthy human feeling and reason, that people cannot believe in them. They can repeat certain words with their lips, but they cannot believe in things devoid of meaning. One can use one's lips to say: 'I believe the world was created six thousand years ago', or: 'I believe in God the Father in three persons', but no one can believe it all because the words make no sense. Therefore, the people of our world who

profess a distorted form of Christianity do not actually believe in it. This is the peculiarity of our times.

## CHAPTER 7

People today do not believe in anything and yet, following the lines of that false definition of faith which they take from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and incorrectly ascribe to St Paul, they imagine they have faith. According to this definition faith is the 'substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen'. But, besides the fact that faith cannot be a substance of something hoped for, since faith is a spiritual state and the substance of things hoped for is an external event, neither can it be the evidence of things not seen, since this evidence, as explained in a subsequent section of the Gospel, is based on trust and evidence of the truth: trust and true faith are two separate concepts. Faith is neither hope nor trust, but a particular spiritual state. Faith is man's awareness that his position in the world obliges him to perform certain actions. A person acts according to his faith, not as the catechism says because he believes in things unseen as in things seen, nor because he wishes to achieve things hoped for, but simply because having defined his position in the world it is natural for him to act according to it. Just as a farmer tills the soil and a seafarer sails the seas, not as the catechism suggests because they both believe in things unseen and hope to be rewarded for their activity (this hope exists but it is not what guides them), but because they regard the activity as their vocation. Similarly a religious believer behaves in a certain way, not because he believes in things unseen, or expects rewards for his conduct, but because

once he has defined his position in the world it is natural for him to act according to this position. If a person has defined his position in society as an unskilled labourer, an artisan, an official or a merchant he considers he ought to work as an unskilled labourer, artisan, official or merchant, and does so. In just the same way men in general, having defined their position in the world in one way or another, unavoidably and naturally act according to this definition (which is sometimes not even a definition but a vague consciousness). Thus, for instance, a person who has defined his position in the world as being a member of God's chosen people, who in order to enjoy God's protection must fulfil His demands, will live in such a way as to fulfil these demands. Another person who has defined his position in such a way that he believes he has passed, and is passing through, various forms of existence and that the deterioration or improvement of his future more or less depends on his actions, will be guided in life by this definition. The behaviour of a third person, who has defined his position as that of an incidental combination of atoms in which a consciousness has been temporarily ignited but which is bound to be extinguished for ever, will differ from the two above-mentioned.

The conduct of these people will be completely different, because they have defined their positions differently, which means that they believe differently. Faith is the same thing as religion with the only difference that by the word religion we imply a phenomenon observed outside ourselves, whereas what we call faith is this phenomenon experienced within ourselves. Faith is

man's conscious relationship with the infinite universe, from which he derives guidance for his activity. And because genuine faith is never irrational, or incompatible with existing knowledge, its characteristics can be neither supernatural nor senseless, as is thought, and has been expressed by the Church Father who said, 'Credo quia absurdum'. On the contrary the conditions of true faith, despite the fact they cannot be proven, not only never include anything contrary to reason, or incompatible with people's knowledge, but always explain those things in life without which the tenets of faith would appear irrational and contradictory.

Thus for instance the ancient Hebrew, believing that there is a higher eternal Almighty Being who created the Universe, the earth, the animals, mankind etc., and who promised to protect his people if they fulfilled his law, was not believing in anything irrational or incompatible with his knowledge. Quite the opposite, this faith elucidated many aspects of life that would otherwise have been inexplicable to him.

In just the same way a Hindu who believes that our souls have been in animals, and that according to the level of good or evil in our lives, they will pass into higher or lower animals, has much that would otherwise be inexplicable clarified by this faith. It is the same with a person who considers life evil and the aim of life to be peace, achieved through the suppression of desire. He does not believe in anything irrational, but, on the contrary, in something that makes his outlook more reasonable than it would be without

this belief. It is the same with the true Christian who believes that God is the spiritual father of all men, and that man reaches the highest state of well-being when he recognizes himself as a son of God and brother to all men. All these beliefs, even if they cannot be proven, are not irrational in themselves, but quite the opposite. They are conducive to a more rational explanation of those phenomena of life which seem irrational and contradictory without them. Moreover, all these beliefs, by defining man's position in the universe, inevitably demand certain actions that accord with this position. And therefore if a religious teaching asserts meaningless propositions that explain nothing but only help to further confuse an understanding of life, it is not a faith but a distortion of it that has already lost the chief characteristic of true faith.

Not only do people today not have this faith, but they do not even know what it is, and what they take to be faith is either an oral repetition of what they are given as the essence of faith, or the fulfilment of ceremonies which, Church Christianity teaches, will help them to achieve their desires.

## CHAPTER 8

People in our world live without faith. One section, the educated, wealthy minority, having freed themselves from the persuasion of the Church, believe in nothing because they regard every faith either as an absurdity, or as a useful means of controlling the masses. The vast, poor and uneducated majority, consisting of people who with few exceptions are true believers, finding themselves slaves under the influence of hypnosis, think they believe in what is suggested to them beneath the guise of faith. But it is not faith, for rather than clarifying man's position in the world, it only obscures it. This situation and the mutual relations between the non-believing, pretentious minority, and the hypnotized majority, shapes the life of our world, which we call Christian. And this life, both of the minority who hold the means of hypnosis in their hands, and of the hypnotized majority, is terrible on account of both the cruelty and immorality of the rulers, and the oppression and stupefaction of the enormous working masses. Never before at any period of religious decline has such a low level of disregard and negligence towards the chief characteristic of all religions and of Christianity in particular – the equality of all men – been reached as in our time. The main reason for the terrible cruelty between men today, apart from the absence of religion, is still the refined complexity of life which shields people from the consequences of their actions. However cruel Attila,[38] Genghis Khan[39] and their followers may have been, the act of killing

people personally, face to face, must have been unpleasant to them, and the consequences of the murder still more unpleasant: the wailing relatives and the presence of the corpses. And thus their cruelty was restrained. Nowadays we kill people through such a complex process of communication, and the consequences of our cruelty are so carefully removed and concealed from us, that there is no restraint on the bestiality of the action. The cruelty of some people towards others will continue to increase until it has reached unprecedented dimensions.

I think that today if, perhaps not the renowned villain Nero,[40] but some commonplace entrepreneur, wanted to make a pond of human blood for the diseased rich to bathe in, as prescribed by their learned doctors, he would be able to arrange it all unhindered so long as he respected the accepted and appropriate forms. Thus he would not compel people to lose blood, but would put them in a position such that their life was at risk unless they did so. In addition to this he would invite priests and scientists – the former to consecrate the pond in the way that they consecrate canons, rifles, prisons and gallows, and the latter to testify to the necessity and justification of such an establishment, just as they have testified to the necessity of wars and houses of ill-repute. The basic principle of all religions – the equality between all men – has been forgotten, neglected and buried under so much ridiculous dogma put forward by the religion, and in science this same inequality (expressed in the theory of the struggle for the existence and survival of the fittest) is acknowledged as such a necessary

condition of life, that the destruction of millions of human lives for the convenience of the ruling minority is regarded as a most commonplace and necessary facet of living, and happens continually.

People of today's world cannot take enough delight in the brilliant, unprecedented and colossal achievements of nineteenth century technology.

There is no doubt that never before in history has such material success, i.e. in conquering the forces of human nature, been achieved as in the nineteenth century. But there is also no doubt that never before in history has there been such a display of immoral living, free of any force restraining man's animal desires, as that which exists now in our Christian humanity, which is becoming ever more bestialized. The material progress achieved in the nineteenth century is truly enormous, but it was, and still is being, purchased at a cost of neglect for the most elementary demands of morality, such as humanity has never witnessed before, not even under Genghis Khan, Attila, or Nero.

No one would argue that iron-clads, railroads, printing presses, tunnels, phonographs, Röntgen rays and so forth are very fine things. Indeed they are, but what are also fine, as Ruskin says, finer beyond comparison with all else, are human lives, of which millions are now destroyed for the acquisition of iron-clads, roads, tunnels etc., all of which disfigure rather than beautify life. The usual reply to this is that they are already inventing, and with time

will have invented, devices to check the destruction of human life existing at the moment. But this is not true. So long as people do not consider all men as their brothers and do not consider human life as the most sacred thing, which rather than destroy they must consider it their first and foremost duty to support; that is so long as people do not behave towards one another in a religious manner, they will always ruin one another's lives for the sake of personal gain. No fool would agree to spend thousands if he could achieve the same aim by spending hundreds, with the addition of a few human lives he finds at his disposal. Each year in Chicago about the same number of people are crushed on the railway. The managers of the railway quite logically do not make any adaptations in order to prevent people from being crushed, since they have calculated that the annual payments to the injured people and their families are less than the interest on the cost of making such adaptations.

It is very likely that people who destroy human lives for their own gain can be shamed by public opinion, or forced to make the adaptations. But as long as people are not religious and commit their acts before man and not God they will make changes in order to protect human lives in one respect, and then in another matter they will once again use human life as the most profitable material.

It is easy to conquer nature and to construct railways, steamships, museums and so forth if you do not spare human lives.

The Egyptian pharaohs were proud of their pyramids and we too admire them, forgetting about the lives of millions of slaves sacrificed in constructing them. In the same way we admire our exhibition palaces, iron-clads and transoceanic cables, forgetting with what we pay for it all. We should only feel proud of it all when it is done freely, by free men and not by slaves.

Christian nations have conquered and subdued the American Indians, Hindus and Africans. They are now doing the same to the Chinese and are proud of it. But these conquests and subjugations really arise, not through the spiritual superiority of the Christian nations, but on the contrary, because on a spiritual level they are far beneath the others. Forgetting the Hindus and the Chinese, even among the Zulus there were, and are, obligatory religious rules, whatever they might be, which condone certain actions and forbid others. In Christendom we have none. Rome conquered the world when it had freed itself from all religions. The same is happening, only to a greater extent, among the Christian nations. They all share in common an absence of religion and consequently, despite internal dissension, are united in one federate band of criminals where theft, plunder, debauchery, individual and mass murder are performed without the slightest pang of conscience and even with utmost self-complacency, as for instance in China not so long ago. Some do not believe in anything and are proud of it. Others pretend to believe in what for their own advantage they have persuaded the masses to believe in beneath the guise of faith. The rest, the great majority of the population, accept as faith the

hypnotism excercised over them and slavishly submit to everything demanded of them by their non-believing rulers and persuaders.

And these persuaders make the same demand as has always been made by Nero and his like, who have tried somehow to fill the emptiness of their lives: the satisfaction of their senseless and over-abundant luxury. Luxury cannot be obtained other than by enslaving other people. As soon as there is slavery there is an increase in luxury, and the increase in luxury inevitably instigates an increase in slavery. It is only people who are hungry, cold and tied down by need who will spend their whole lives doing something they have no need of doing, but which is needed for the amusement of their masters.

## CHAPTER 9

In the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis there is a profound point where the author says that before the flood God had already seen how the spirit He had given men in order for them to serve Him was being used simply to serve their own lust. And that He became so angry He regretted having created them and resolved that before annihilating them altogether He would shorten man's life to 120 years. The very same thing which, according to the Bible, angered God to limit human life is happening now among the people of Christendom.

Reason is the power man possesses to define his relationship to the universe. Since the relationship is the same for everyone the establishing of it, i.e. religion, unites men. Union among men gives them the highest attainable well-being, on both the physical and the spiritual level.

Complete unity with the highest and most perfect reason and, thereby, perfect well-being is an ideal towards which humanity strives. By giving identical answers to all members of any particular society, when they ask questions about what the world is and what they the inhabitants are, all religions unite men and bring them closer to the reality of well-being. But, when reason diverges from its own particular function (the clarification of the relationship with God and the activities that conform to it), and is directed not only at service to the flesh, or bitter strife with other men and other creatures, but also at justifying this evil existence,

so contrary to man's nature and purpose, then these dreadful misfortunes occur from which the majority of today's people are suffering. Moreover, a situation then arises whereby it is almost impossible to return to a reasonable, decent life. Pagans, united by primitive religious teachings, are far nearer to an apprehension of the truth than are the supposed Christian nations of today, who live without any religion and among whom the most advanced people are convinced, and persuade others, that religion is not necessary and that it is far better to live without it.

Among the pagans one can find men who have realized the inconsistency of their faith with both their increasing knowledge, and the demands of their reason, and who try to adopt a religious teaching more compatible with the spiritual state of the nation, which unites their fellow countrymen and co-believers. But among the men of our world, where some regard religion as an instrument with which to govern the masses, others think it an absurdity, and the vast majority, grossly deceived, think they are in possession of the true religion, all become impervious to any advance or approach to the truth.

Proud of their improvements in things needed by the life of the body, and of their refined, useless reasonings, aimed at proving their own righteousness as well as their superiority over any other nation at any other historical period, they stagnate in their ignorance and immorality. And they are fully convinced that they are standing at a summit never previously reached by humanity,

and that each step forwards along the path of ignorance and immorality raises them to yet greater heights of enlightenment and progress.

## CHAPTER 10

It is in man's nature to create harmony between his rational (spiritual) and his bodily (physical) activity. A person cannot be at peace until he has somehow established this harmony. But it can be established in two ways. The first is when he uses his reason to decide on the necessity, or desirability, of a certain action, or actions, and then acts on his reason. The second is for a person to perform actions under the influence of his emotions and then to invent intellectual explanations or justifications for them.

The first method of reaching conformity between action and reason is typical of those who profess some kind of religion and on the basis of its doctrines know what they ought to do, and what they ought not to do. The second method is typical of the majority of non-religious people, who lack a general standard of evaluating the worthiness of their actions and who therefore always establish conformity between their reason and their-actions, not by subjecting the latter to the former but – having accomplished an action under the impulse of feeling – by using reason to justify them.

The religious person, knowing what is good and what is wrong in his actions and in those of others, and why one is good and another bad, when he sees a contradiction between the demands of his reason and his actions (or those of others), will use all the power of his reason to find a way of eradicating it. In other words, he will learn the best way of achieving harmony between them.

But a person without religion, lacking the guiding principle for determining the value of his actions (other than the pleasure they afford), and yielding to the impulse of his varied and frequently contradictory emotions, involuntarily falls into a contradiction. Finding himself in this state he tries to resolve, or hide the contradiction with rationalizations that are variously complicated and skilful, but always dishonest. Thus, while the deliberations of religious people are always simple, uncomplicated and honest, the mental activity of non-religious people is particularly subtle and extremely complex and dishonest.

If we take a very simple example: that of a person prone to debauchery, i.e. unchaste, unfaithful to his wife, or unmarried and prone to debauchery. If he is a religious man he will know that it is wrong and concentrate all his mental energy on finding a way of freeing himself from his vice. He might avoid intercourse with adulterers or adulteresses, increase his workload, forbid himself to look upon a woman as an object of desire, etc. All this is perfectly simple and intelligible to anyone. But if a dissipated person is non-religious he will immediately invent all kinds of explanations as to why it is a very good thing to love women. This leads him to all sorts of complex, cunning and subtle considerations about the mergence of souls, beauty, free love and so forth. The more these are propagated the further they obscure the matter and conceal what should be done.

For those without religion the same happens in all spheres of their activity and thought. In order to hide the inner contradictions, complex, subtle arguments are piled up and the mind becomes crowded with all sorts of useless rubbish, deflecting the person's attention from what is important and essential and making it possible for him to stagnate in the lie, in which today's people are living, without noticing it.

'Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil,' it is written in the Gospel. 'For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved' (John, III, 19).

Thus, due to the absence of religion, the people of today's world have built themselves a very cruel, bestial and immoral life. They have also led their complex, subtle and useless mental activities to such a level of unnecessary intricacy and confusion in order to conceal the evil in their lives, that the majority have entirely lost the capacity of differentiating between good and evil, falsehood and truth.

There is not a single question which the men of our world can approach simply and straightforwardly. Every question, be it economic (internal or foreign), civil, diplomatic, scientific, not to mention religious and philosophical ones, are put so artificially and mistakenly, wrapped in such a thick layer of complex, unnecessary argument and full of so many subtle twists of meaning and words and such sophistry and debate that all

discussions of such questions go round and round in circles, grasping hold of nothing, like a disconnected car wheel. They lead nowhere except to achieve the one purpose for which they are instigated: to conceal from oneself and others the evil in which men live and which they commit.

## CHAPTER 11

In every sphere of today's so-called sciences the same feature renders useless all the mental effort people direct towards investigating various fields of knowledge. The feature is that all the scientific investigations of our times evade the essential question demanding an answer, and examine secondary issues, the investigation of which leads to nothing but becomes increasingly complex the further it proceeds. It could not be otherwise with a science that selects its objects at random, rather than according to the demands of a religious outlook defining what man should study and why, and what first and what follows. Thus, for example, in the currently fashionable question of sociology, or political economy, there would appear to be only one question: how and why some people do nothing while others work for them? (If there is another question it is inherent in the first: why do people work separately, hindering each other, and not jointly which would be more profitable? If there were no inequality there would be no strife.) It appears that there should be only this question, but science does not think to pose it, or reply to it, but initiates its discussions from a distance, conducting them in such a way that in no instance can its conclusions resolve or enhance a solution to the basic question. Discussions begin with questions about what was and what is, and the past and the present are regarded as something as unalterable as the course of the heavenly bodies in the sky. Abstract concepts of value, capital, profit and interest are

devised, leading to the complicated game of human intelligence which the disputants have been carrying on for one hundred years already. In truth, the question can be resolved very easily and simply.

The solution is that since all men are brothers and equals, each person must behave towards others as he would wish them to behave towards him, and the whole problem, therefore, rests on the destruction of a false religious law and the establishment of a true one. But the leading figures of Christendom will not accept this answer: quite the opposite, they try to conceal the very possibility of such a solution from people, and in order to do so devote themselves to the futile mental activity they call science.

The same happens in the field of jurisprudence. There would seem to be only one essential question: why are there people who permit themselves to exercise force on others, to rob, imprison, execute, send them to war, and much else besides? The solution to the question is very simple, looking at it in the only way that befits the question, i.e. the religious one. From the point of view of religion a person must not perform acts of violence against his neighbour, so there is only one thing necessary to resolve the problem: destroy all the superstitions and sophisms that permit violence, and firmly instil in men the religious principles that exclude a possibility of violence.

Yet the leading figures not only fail to do this, but they devote all their wits to concealing from others the possibility of such a

solution. They write shelves of books on different laws: civil, criminal, political, ecclesiastic, financial and others, and they expound and debate these themes in the complete conviction that they are doing something not just useful, but very important. In answer to the question of why, among people born equals, some may judge, constrain, rob and execute others, they give no answers; and not just this but they fail to recognize the existence of the question. According to their doctrine this violence is committed not by people, but by some abstract entity called the State.

In exactly the same way the learned people of today, in all spheres of knowledge, evade and keep silent about the essential questions and conceal the inner contradictions. In the study of history the essential question is: how did the working masses, i.e. nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of humanity, live? And we get nothing resembling an answer to this question; the question does not even exist, yet historians of one discipline write piles of books about Louis XI's stomach-aches, about the atrocities committed by Elizabeth I of England and Ivan the Terrible of Russia, about who their ministers were and what literary verses and comedies were written for the entertainment of these sovereigns, their favourites and ministers. Historians of another discipline write about what the places people lived in were like, what they ate and what they traded in, what sort of clothes they wore and, in general, about things that could have no influence on the life of the nation, but were consequences of their religion,

which this kind of historian imagines to be a result of the sort of food people ate, or the clothes they wore.

In truth, an answer to the question of how the working classes used to live can be given only by recognizing religion as an essential condition of people's lives. The answer therefore lies in the study of those religions the people professed and which brought them to the position they found themselves in.

In the study of natural history there seems to be especial need to obscure men's common sense. But here too, because of the attitude adopted by contemporary science, instead of giving the most natural answer to the question of what the kingdom of living creatures, plant and animal, is, and how it is subdivided, an idle, unclear and completely useless prattle is carried on (directed for the most part at the Biblical account of the creation) as to how organisms came into existence. No one really needs to know, or can know, this, since however the origin is explained, it lies hidden from us in the infinity of time and space. Yet there are theories, refutations and new theories on this theme which form thousands of books in which the unexpected conclusion is always the same: that the law of life to which man must submit is the struggle for existence.

Added to all this, the applied sciences, such as technology and medicine, inevitably diverge from their reasonable purpose and adopt a false direction as a result of the absence of any religious guiding principle. Thus the whole of technology is aimed not at

easing the burden of the working masses, but at the improvements requested by the wealthy classes, thus increasing the division between rich and poor, masters and slaves. If some advantage from these inventions and improvements, some small fragment, falls into the lap of the working classes, it is certainly not because they were intended for the people, but simply because by their nature they could not be kept from them.

It is the same with medical science which has advanced in its false direction to the extent that it is only available to the rich. The masses, because of their life-style and poverty, and because no one is concerned about improving their lot, can only make use of it under such restricted conditions that this assistance gives a clear example of how medical science has diverged from its purpose.

This divergence and perversion of the essential question is most striking in what goes today by the name of philosophy. There would seem to be only one question for philosophy to resolve: what must I do? Despite being combined with an enormous amount of unnecessary confusion, answers to the question have at any rate been given within the philosophical tradition of the Christian nations. For example, in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason,* or in Spinoza, Schopenhauer[41] and especially Rousseau. But in more recent times, since Hegel's assertion that all that exists is reasonable, the question of what one must do has been pushed to the background and philosophy has directed its whole attention to the investigation of things as they are, and to fitting them into a

prearranged theory. This was the first step backwards. The second step, degrading human thought yet further, was the acceptance of the struggle for existence as a basic law, simply because that struggle can be observed among animals and plants. According to this theory the destruction of the weakest is a law which should not be opposed. And finally, the third step was taken when the childish originality of Nietzche's half-crazed thought, presenting nothing complete or coherent, but only various drafts of immoral and completely unsubstantiated ideas, was accepted by the leading figures as the final word in philosophical science. In reply to the question: what must we do? the answer is now put straightforwardly as: live as you like, without paying attention to the lives of others.

If anyone doubted that the Christian world of today has reached a frightful state of torpor and brutalization (not forgetting the recent crimes committed in the Boers and in China, which were defended by the clergy and acclaimed as heroic feats by all the world powers), the extraordinary success of Nietzche's works is enough to provide irrefutable proof of this. Some disjointed writings, striving after effect in a most sordid manner, appear, written by a daring, but limited and abnormal German, suffering from power mania. Neither in talent nor in their basic argument do these writings justify public attention. In the days of Kant, Leibniz,[42] or Hume, or even fifty years ago, such writings would not only have received no attention, but they would not even have appeared. But today all the so-called educated people are praising

the ravings of Mr N, arguing about him, elucidating him, and countless copies of his works are printed in all languages.

Turgenev made the witty remark that there are inverse platitudes, which are frequently employed by people lacking in talent who wish to attract attention to themselves. Everyone knows, for instance, that water is wet, and someone suddenly says, very seriously, that water is dry, not that ice is, but that water is dry, and the conviction with which this is stated attracts attention.

Similarly, the whole world knows that virtue consists in the subjugation of one's passions, or in self-renunciation. It is not just the Christian world, against whom Nietzsche howls, that knows this, but it is an eternal supreme law towards which all humanity has developed, including Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism and the ancient Persian religion. And suddenly a man appears who declares that he is convinced that self-renunciation, meekness, submissiveness and love are all vices that destroy humanity (he has in mind Christianity, ignoring all the other religions). One can understand why such a declaration baffled people at first. But after giving it a little thought and failing to find any proof of the strange propositions, any rational person ought to throw the books aside and wonder if there is any kind of rubbish that would not find a publisher today. But this has not happened with Nietzsche's books. The majority of pseudo-enlightened people seriously look into the theory of the superman, and acknowledge its author to be a great philosopher, a descendant of Descartes, Leibniz and Kant.

And all this has come about because the majority of the pseudo-enlightened men of today object to any reminder of virtue, or to its chief premise: self-renunciation and love – virtues that restrain and condemn the animal side of their life. They gladly welcome a doctrine, however incoherently and disjointedly expressed, of egotism and cruelty, sanctioning the ideas of personal happiness and superiority over the lives of others, by which they live.

## CHAPTER 12

Christ reproached the scribes and pharisees because they took the keys to the kingdom of heaven, but neither entered themselves, nor permitted others to.

The learned scribes of today do the same thing: they have taken the keys, not to the kingdom of heaven, but to enlightenment, but neither enter themselves, nor allow others to. Using any manner of deceit and hypnotic power, the priests and clergy have instilled in people the idea that Christianity is not a religion proclaiming the equality of all men, and therefore destructive to the whole of today's pagan structure of life, but that on the contrary, it supports this structure and instructs us to differentiate between people, as we would differentiate between one star and another. It bids us to acknowledge that all power is derived from God and to obey it absolutely. It suggests to the oppressed that in general terms their position is ordained by God and they should bear it meekly and humbly, and submit to the oppressors. These oppressors need not be meek and humble but, as emperors, kings, popes, bishops, and secular and spiritual authorities of any kind, they must correct others by teaching and punishing them while themselves living in splendour and luxury, the provision of which is an obligation of those they subject. Thanks to this false teaching which they whole-heartedly support, the ruling classes govern the people, forcing them to provide for the luxuries, vanities and vices of the rulers. Moreover, the scientists, being the only ones who have freed

themselves from this hypnotic influence, and who alone can deliver the people from their yoke, and who say they wish to do so, rather than actually doing something to accomplish this aim, do the very opposite, imagining that they thereby serve the people.

It would seem that from even the most cursory observation of what it is that most troubles the rulers these men should realize what it is that really motivates, and what it is that really holds the people down in certain positions and they should direct all their energies at that motivating force. Not only do they fail to do this, but they consider such a thing quite useless.

These men appear not to want to see all this and diligently and often sincerely they do all sorts of things for the people, yet failing to do the one thing needed above all else. In order to understand where it is they should direct their efforts to free the masses from enslavement, they need only watch with what fervour all rulers contend for the motive force by means of which the people are governed.

What is it the Turkish sultan guards, and what does he cling on to above all else? Why on entering a town does the Russian emperor first of all kiss the icons and relics? And why, despite all the lustre of culture he so effects, and regardless of whether it is opportune, does the German emperor speak of God, Christ, the sanctity of religion, oaths, etc. in all his speeches? It is because they all know that their power rests on the army, and the possibility of an army existing at all rests on religion. If wealthy

people happen to be particularly religious and pretend to be believers, going to Church and observing the sabbath, they do all this on the whole because their instinct for self-preservation warns them that their exclusive and privileged position in society is bound to the religion they profess.

Very often these men do not know in what way the power they have is based on religious deceptions. However, their instinct for self-preservation shows them the weak spot in that which maintains their position, and they defend this before all else. These men always permit, and always have permitted socialist and even revolutionary propaganda, within certain limits. But they never allow religious principles to be touched.

Therefore, if the leading figures of today, scholars, liberals, socialists, revolutionaries, anarchists, cannot use history or psychology to understand what it is that motivates people, they should be persuaded by what they see, that men are not motivated by material conditions, but only by religion.

Yet it is a surprising fact that while the scholarly and learned men of today have a very acute insight and understanding of the people's living conditions, they do not see what stares them in the eye. If these men deliberately behave in such a way as to leave the nation in religious ignorance in order to maintain their privileged position among the minority, it is a terrible, horrible fraud. Those who behave in this way are the very hypocrites Christ condemned so strongly – indeed the only people He condemned. And He

condemned them because no other monsters or evildoers have ever brought so much evil into human life as these sort of people have.

If these men were sincere the only explanation for such strange mental shortcomings is that, just as the masses are under the influence of a false religion, so too these pseudo-enlightened men of today find themselves under the influence of a false science, which has decided that the main nerve by which humanity has always lived, and still lives, is no longer necessary and can be replaced by something else.

## CHAPTER 13

The peculiarity of our times lies in the deceit, or perfidy, of the bibliophiles, the educated men of our world. In this too lies the cause of the impoverished condition in which Christian humanity lives, and of the brutalization in which it is increasingly immersing itself.

As a rule the leading, educated people of today's world assert that the false religious beliefs held by the masses do not present anything of great importance, and that it is neither worthwhile nor necessary to confront them directly as Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau and others have done previously. In their opinion science (i.e. the uncoordinated, incidental knowledge disseminated among the people) will achieve this purpose of its own accord. In other words, that a person who has learnt how many million miles the earth is from the sun, and which metals can be found in the sun and stars, will cease to believe in the doctrines of the Church.

There is a great delusion, or terrible deception in this sincere, or insincere, assumption or assertion. From the very earliest childhood years, the years most susceptible to suggestion, when educators cannot be careful enough about what they impart to children, they teach them the ridiculous, immoral dogmas of the so-called Christian religion, which are incompatible with reason and knowledge. Children are taught the dogma of the Trinity, which cannot be accommodated in a healthy mind, and the descent of one of the three Gods to earth for the salvation of the human race

and His resurrection and ascent to Heaven. They are taught about the awaited second coming and the punishment of eternal torments for not believing in these dogmas. They are taught to pray for their needs and for many other things. And when all this doctrine, compatible with neither reason, contemporary knowledge or human conscience, is indelibly stamped on the child's receptive mind, they leave him alone to fathom as best he can the contradictions arising from the dogmas he has accepted and assumed as the undoubted truth. No one tells him how he can and should reconcile these contradictions. If theologians do try to reconcile them they only succeed in confusing the matter still further. And bit by bit a person grows accustomed (with strong support from theologians) to the fact that he cannot trust in his reason and therefore everything in the world is possible, for he has nothing with which to differentiate between good and evil, lies and the truth. And in the thing most important to him - his actions – he must not be guided by his reason but by what others tell him. One can see the terrible distortion of man's spiritual world that inevitably results from such an education, and is supported in adult life by all the techniques of persuasion which, with the aid of the clergy, are continually exercised on people.

If a person of strong personality, with great labour and suffering, frees himself from the hypnotism in which he has been educated since childhood and which he has maintained in adult life, the perversion of his spirit by which he has been persuaded to distrust his own reason cannot disappear without leaving a trace,

just as in the physical world the poisoning of an organism with a strong toxin cannot vanish without leaving any trace. Having freed himself from the hypnotic influence of this deceit, such a person, hating the falsehood from which he has just released himself, naturally adopts the doctrine of the leading figures, according to which religion is regarded as one of the chief impediments to man's advance along the path of progress. And having adopted this teaching, such a man becomes like his teachers: quite unprincipled, i.e. someone without a conscience, guided in life by nothing but his whims, who rather than condemning himself on account of this, considers himself as standing at the highest point of spiritual development man can reach.

This is what happens to people with very strong personalities. The less strong, while being led to doubt, never entirely free themselves from the deceit in which they were brought up. By adhering to various fancifully construed and obscure theories intended to justify the absurdity of the dogma they have accepted, and by living in a realm of doubts, obscurities, sophism and self-deception, they only enhance the blindness of the masses and oppose their awakening.

However, the majority of people, lacking the strength and the opportunity to struggle against the assurances forced upon them, will live and die for generation after generation, in the same way as they live now, deprived of man's highest blessing: a truly

religious understanding of life. And they will always be no more than the passive tools of the classes who rule over them and deceive them.

As for the terrible deception, the leading figures say that it is not important and not worth tackling directly. The only explanation of such an assertion, if it is made sincerely, is that they themselves are under the hypnotic influence of a false science. If it is not made sincerely, the explanation is that an assault on established beliefs is not profitable and is frequently dangerous. In any case, one way or another, the claim that profession of a false religion is harmless, or at any rate unimportant, and that it is therefore possible to spread enlightenment without destroying religious deception, is entirely incorrect.

Humanity can only be saved from disaster when it frees itself from the hypnotic influence the priests hold over it, and from that into which the learned are leading it. In order to pour something into a full vessel one must first empty it of its contents. Likewise, it is essential to free people from the deception they are held in, in order for them to adopt the true religion: i.e. a relationship with God, the source of all things, which is correct and in accord with the development of humanity, together with the guidance for conduct that results from this relationship.

## CHAPTER 14

‘But is there really a true religion? Religions are endlessly varied and we do not have the right to call any one of them true simply because it comes closest to our taste.’ This is what men say as they examine the external forms of religion as if it were some kind of disease from which they feel themselves free, but from which others still suffer. But this is not true: religions differ in their external forms but are all the same in their basic principles. In all religions these basic principles form that true religion which alone is suited to all today’s people, and the adoption of which is the only thing that can save men from their misfortunes.

Humanity has existed for a long time and just as it has successively made practical acquisitions, so too it could not help formulating those spiritual principles that have formed the basis of life, and the code of conduct following from these principles. The fact that blind people do not see them does not prove that they do not exist. It is not some kind of individual religion with its own peculiarities and distortions, but a religion consisting of religious principles which are found to be identical in all the widespread religions known to us, and which are professed by nine-tenths of the human race. The only reason why people have not become irreparably brutalized is because the finest men of all nations have, albeit unconsciously, clung to this religion and practised it. Only the deceitful assurances imposed on people, with the help of the clergy and scientists, prevents them from consciously accepting it.

The principles of this true religion are so appropriate to man that as soon as people discover them they accept them as something they have known for a long time and which stand to reason. For us, the true religion is Christianity in those of its principles which conform, not in their external form, but in their basic principles, to Brahmanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Hebraism, Buddhism and even Mohammedanism. In just the same way, for those who practise Brahmanism, Confucianism, etc., true religion is that where the basic principles conform to those of all the other great religions. The principles are very simple, comprehensible and uncomplicated.

They are as follows: that there is a God who is the origin of everything; that there is an element of this divine origin in every person, which he can diminish or increase through his way of living; that in order for someone to increase this source he must suppress his passions and increase the love within himself; that the practical means of achieving this consist in doing to others as you would wish them to do to you. All these principles are common to Brahmanism, Hebraism, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and Mohammedanism. (If Buddhism does not provide a definition of God, it nevertheless recognizes that with which man unites and merges as he reaches Nirvana. And that something is the same origin which the other religions recognize as God.)

‘But that is not a religion,’ say the men of today, accustomed as they are to regarding the supernatural, i.e. the absurd, as the main

sign of religion. ‘It is anything else you like, philosophy, ethics, rationalization, but not religion.’ According to their way of seeing things, religion must be ridiculous and incomprehensible (credo quia absurdum). Yet it was from just these very religious principles, or rather as a consequence of their being propagated as religious doctrines, that through a long process of distortion, all the religious miracles and supernatural events were drawn up, which are now considered basic characteristics of any faith. To claim that the supernatural and irrational form the basic characteristics of religion is much the same as noticing only the rotten apples and then claiming that the basic features of the fruit named apple are a flaccid bitterness and a harmful effect produced in the stomach.

Religion is the definition of man’s relationship to the origin of everything, and of the purpose acquired as a result of this relationship, and of the rules of conduct that follow from this purpose. And the religion common to all, the basic principles of which are alike in all practices, fully satisfies these demands. It defines man’s relationship to God as of a part to a whole. From this relationship follows man’s purpose, which lies in increasing his spiritual qualities, and man’s purpose leads to the practical rules of the law: do to others as you would have them do unto you.

People often doubt, and at one time I myself doubted, that such an abstract rule as ‘Do to others as you would have them do unto you’ could be as obligatory a rule and guide to conduct as the more simple rules: the fasts, prayers, communion, etc. But an irrefutable

reply to this doubt is provided by the spiritual conditions of, let us say, a Russian peasant who prefers to die rather than to spit out the Host on a dung heap, but who is nevertheless prepared to kill his own brothers at someone else's command.

Why should demands derived from the rule of doing to others as you would have them do unto you – for instance: do not kill your fellow men, do not curse, do not commit adultery, do not take vengeance, do not make use of your brother's needs for the satisfaction of your own whims, and many others – why should they not be taught with as much force, and become as obligatory and incontestable as the belief in the sanctity of the eucharist and images, etc., is for people whose faith is based more on trust than on clear inner consciousness?

## CHAPTER 15

The truths of the religion common to everyone today are so very simple, intelligible and close to the hearts of all men. It would seem that parents, rulers and teachers only need to instil in children these clear and simple truths, common to people of all religions, the metaphysical essence of which is that the spirit of God is in man, and the practical law of which is that man must behave towards others as he would wish others to behave towards him, rather than the outdated and absurd teachings on the Trinity, the Virgin Mother, the Redemption, Indras,[43] Trimurti[44] and Buddhas and Mohammeds flying in the sky, and this in itself would alter the whole of mankind's life. Whereas nowadays children are instilled with the belief that God sent His son to redeem the sin of Adam, and that He established His Church, which must be obeyed as well as the rules arising from these principles as to when and where to pray and make sacrifices, when to abstain from which kind of food and on which days to refrain from work; if only instead of this it were taught and confirmed that God is a spirit, the manifestation of which dwells within us, and the strength of which we increase through our lives. One need only teach these ideas and all that follows quite naturally from these principles in just the same way as all the utterly useless stories about impossible events, and rules of meaningless ceremonies arising from these stories are currently put forward and instead of irrational strife and discord there would very soon emerge a peaceful, happy and

united existence guided by one religion, with no need of help from diplomats, international law, congress law or from political economists and all the subdivisions of Socialists.

But nothing of the kind happens: people not only fail to destroy the deception of the false religion and propagate the true one but, quite the opposite, they distance themselves ever more and more, and further and further, from the possibility of accepting the truth.

The main reason why people do not do the thing that is most natural, essential and feasible is that people today are so accustomed, as a consequence of their irreligious lives, to establishing and securing their existence by force, bayonets, bullets, dungeons and gallows that they believe this sort of arrangement of life to be normal, and the only possible way. Moreover, it is not only those who profit by the existing order who think in this way, but also those who suffer from it, so stupefied are they by the hypnotic influence exercised on them that they, too, in the same way consider force to be the only means of construing a well-ordered human society. But it is precisely this arrangement and the consolidation of the social norm through violence that does more than anything to distance people from understanding the causes of their suffering, and thereby from the possibility of building a true social order.

What is accomplished is something similar to what a bad or malicious doctor does as he drives a malignant eruption inwards,

thus not only deceiving the patient but worsening the illness and preventing any cure.

It seems very convenient for those who rule over and enslave the masses, and who think and say ‘après nous le deluge’, to use the army and clergy, soldiers and politicians, the threat of bayonets, bullets, imprisonment, workhouses and the gallows, in order to force the servile classes to remain in their condition of stupefaction and enslavement and not to hinder the ruling classes from exploiting their position. And the ruling men do it all, calling it good order, whereas nothing so hinders the establishment of good social order as this does. In reality, this sort of arrangement, far from being good order, is the establishment of evil.

If the people of our society who still possess the remnants of those religious principles which still exist among the masses had not before their eyes the continual performance of criminal behaviour, committed by those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility of watching over order and morality in people’s lives – the wars, executions, imprisonments, taxation, the sale of vodka and opium – they would never have dreamt of committing one hundredth of the evil deeds, deceits, violations, murders, which they now commit in the full conviction that these deeds are good and natural to man.

The law of human life is such that the improvement of it, whether for the individual or for society, is only possible through inner, moral perfection. All the efforts people make to improve

their lives through violent external behaviour towards one another serve as the most potent form of propaganda and example of evil, and do not improve life, but, on the contrary, increase the evil which gathers size like a snowball and increasingly alienates people from the only possible way of genuinely improving their lives.

The extent to which the habit of violence and criminal behaviour committed under the guise of a law by the guardians of order and morality becomes ever more frequent and cruel, and is increasingly justified by the false assurances that are presented as a religion, will determine the extent to which people will become more and more convinced of the idea that the law of their life does not lie in love and service to one's neighbour, but in struggling against and devouring one another.

And the more they become convinced of this notion, which degrades them to the animal plane, the harder it will be for them to rouse themselves from the hypnotic trance they are in, and to accept as the basis of life the true religion common to the whole of today's humanity.

A vicious circle has been established: the absence of religion makes animal life, based on violence, possible; animal life, based on violence, makes it increasingly impossible to be free of hypnotic influence and to adopt the true religion. And, therefore, people do not do what is most natural, possible and necessary in our times:

they do not destroy the deception that resembles religion, and do not adopt and propagate the truth.

## CHAPTER 16

Can there be a way out of this vicious circle, and if so, what is it?

At first it seems as if the people who should lead men out of this vicious circle are the governments that have taken upon themselves the responsibility of guiding the life of the people for their good. This is what those who have tried to alter the structure of life based on force, and to replace it with a reasonable structure based on mutual love and service, have always thought. It is what the Christian reformers thought, as also did the founders of various European theories of Communism, as well as the illustrious Chinese reformer, Mo Tzu[45] who suggested that for the good of the people the government should not instruct school children in the science of war, and should not reward adults for military achievements, but should instruct both children and adults in the rules of respect and love, and give rewards and encouragement for deeds of love. So also thought and think the many Russian religious peasant-reformers whom I have known and still know, from Sytaev[46] to the old man who has now on five occasions presented a petition to the Tsar asking him to revoke the false religion and propagate Christianity.

People naturally suppose that a government which justifies its existence by taking care of the welfare of the nation must, to ensure this welfare, wish to use the only means that can in no instance harm the people, but can only be conducive to the most fruitful results. But in no time or place have governments ever

taken this obligation upon themselves, but on the contrary, they have always and everywhere shown the greatest fervour in defending the existing, false doctrine, and have used all possible means to persecute those who have attempted to inform people of the basic religious truths. In reality it cannot be otherwise: for governments to expose the falsity of existing religions and to propagate the true one would amount to the same as a person cutting down the branch on which he is sitting.

But if governments do not do this, it would seem certain that those learned men who have freed themselves from the deception of false religions, and who say they wish to serve the people who have provided for them, are sure to do it. But these people, just like the governments, do not do so: firstly, because they consider it pointless to expose themselves to unpleasantnesses and the risks of political persecution for unmasking a fraud which the government protects and which, in their opinion, will collapse of its own accord; secondly, because, considering all religion to be an outlived error, they have nothing to offer the people in place of the fraud they would destroy.

There remain those huge masses of uneducated people who are under the hypnotic influence of Church and State deception, and who therefore consider that the semblance of religion which has been instilled in them is the only true religion, and that there is no other, nor could there be. The masses are in the grip of a constant and intensified hypnotic influence. Generation after generation

they are born, live and die in the same stupefied state in which they are now held by the clergy and government, and if they do free themselves from it they invariably fall into the category of scientists who negate religion, and their influence becomes as useless and harmful as that of their teachers.

Thus for some it is not advantageous and for others it is not possible.

## CHAPTER 17

There would appear to be no way out.

And indeed there is not and cannot be any way out of this situation for non-religious people. Even if those who belong to the upper, governing classes pretend to be concerned for the welfare of the masses, they will never attempt (nor can they, guided as they are by worldly pursuits) to destroy the torpor and enslavement in which the masses live, and which enables the governing classes to rule over them. In exactly the same way, those belonging to the enslaved masses and also guided by worldly aims cannot wish to worsen their burdensome situation by struggling against the upper classes in order to expose the false teaching and propagate the truth. Neither of the two have any reason to do so, and if they are intelligent people they will never attempt to do it.

But this does not apply to religious people, to those religious people who, however perverted a society may be, always guard with their lives that sacred flame of religion, without which humanity could not exist. There are times (such as nowadays) when these people go unnoticed, are despised and scorned by all and spend their lives in obscurity, in exile, prisons and penal battalions, as happens here in Russia. But these people exist and it is they who preserve rational human life. However few there may be of these religious people, it is they alone who can tear asunder, and who do tear asunder, the enchanted circle in which people are shackled. They are able to do so because all the disadvantages and

dangers that hinder worldly man from opposing the existing order of life not only do not exist for the religious person, but they strengthen his ardour in the struggle against the lie, and in confessing by word and deed that which he believes to be the divine truth. If he is a member of the ruling class he will not wish to conceal the truth in order to protect his own privileged position, but quite the opposite: since he hates these privileges he will make every effort to free himself from them and to preach the truth, for he already has no other purpose in life than that of service to God. If he is a member of the enslaved masses, then similarly he will refute the desire, common to the majority of people in his position, of improving the physical conditions of his life; for such a person will have no other purpose than that of fulfilling God's will by exposing falsehood and teaching the truth, and no form of suffering or threat can prevent him from living in conformity with this single purpose which he recognizes in life. They will both act in this way as naturally as the worldly person labours and puts up with privations in order to acquire wealth, or to please a ruler from whom he expects a reward. Every religious person believes in this way because a human soul enlightened by religion no longer believes in the life of this world (as do non-religious people), but lives in eternal, everlasting life where the suffering and death of this world are as insignificant as the blistered hands or wearied limbs of a ploughman ploughing a field.

It is these men who will tear asunder the enchanted circle in which people are now shackled. However few they are in number,

however low their social standing, and however lacking they are in education and ability, it is these people who, as sure as the fire that lights the parched steppe, will set alight the whole world and all those hearts of men that have been dried up by years of irreligious living and are thirsting for renewal.

Religion is not a belief established once and for all in certain supernatural events that are supposed to have taken place at a particular time, nor is it a belief in the necessity of certain prayers and rituals, nor, as the scientists think, is it a survival of the superstitions of ancient ignorance which have no meaning or relevance to life today. Religion is a relationship established between man, everlasting life, and God in conformity with reason and contemporary knowledge, and which alone pushes humanity forwards to its destined aim.

'The soul of man is the lamp of God,' says a wise Jewish proverb. Man is a weak and miserable creature when God's light is not burning in his soul. But when it burns (and it only burns in souls enlightened by religion), man becomes the most powerful creature in the world. And it cannot be otherwise, for what then works in him is not his own strength, but the strength of God.

This then is what religion is and what its essence consists of.

# RELIGION AND MORALITY[47]

You have asked me: (1) What I understand by the word ‘religion’, and (2) Do I consider it possible for morality to exist independently of religion, as I understand it?

I will try to the best of my ability to answer these extremely important and well-put questions in the best possible way.

There are three different meanings commonly ascribed to the word ‘religion’.

The first is that religion is a well-known, true revelation made by God to man, and a worship of God subsequent to that revelation. This meaning is ascribed to religion by people who believe in one or other of the existing religions, and who therefore consider that religion to be the only true one.

The second meaning ascribed to religion is that it is a collection of certain superstitious tenets, and a superstitious form of worship arising from them. This is the meaning ascribed to religion by non-believers in general, or by those who do not believe in the religion they are defining.

The third meaning ascribed to religion is that it is a code of propositions and rules devised by intelligent people as essential to the ordinary masses, both for their comfort, and in order to control their passions and govern them. This is the meaning ascribed to

religion by those who are indifferent to it as such, but who regard it as a useful tool of government.

According to the first definition religion is a well-known and irrefutable truth which for the welfare of mankind it is desirable and even necessary to propagate, using all means possible.

According to the second definition religion is a collection of superstitions from which it is desirable and even obligatory for the welfare of mankind to spare people, by any possible means.

According to the third definition religion is a particular device that is useful to people, and although it is not necessary to highly developed people, it is nevertheless vital for the consolation and control of the masses, and must be maintained for that purpose.

The first definition is similar to that which might be given to music by a person who says that music is the particular song he knows and loves best, and which is desirable to teach to as many people as possible.

The second is similar to that which might be given to music by a person who does not understand, and therefore does not like, music and who says that it is the production of sounds by the throat and mouth, or by hands controlling particular instruments, and that it is necessary that people be taught how to abstain from this useless and harmful occupation as quickly as possible.

The third is similar to that which might be given to music by a person who says that it is something that is useful for teaching

dancing or marching, and which ought to be maintained for that purpose.

The differences and inadequacy of these definitions arise from the fact that they all fail to grasp the essence of music and only define its manifestations from the point of view of the person making the definition. Exactly the same thing applies to the three definitions of religion that are given above.

The first definition of religion says that it is something in which, according to his convictions, the person making the definition truly believes.

According to the second definition it is something which the person making the definition observes other people to believe in.

According to the third definition it is something that it is useful to make other people believe in.

None of these three definitions really define the essence of religion, but rather people's belief in something they take for religion. In the first definition an understanding of religion is replaced by the faith of the person making the definition. In the second instance it is replaced by other people's belief in what they consider to be religion. In the third it is replaced by a belief in something that people are given, and told is religion.

What then is faith? And why do people believe in what they believe? What is faith, from where did it arise?

Among the majority of those comprising today's cultured masses it is taken for granted that the question of religion is settled, and

that the essence of all religions lies in the consequence of a superstitious fear before the uncomprehended phenomena of nature, and in the personification, deification and worship of these natural forces.

This opinion is accepted on trust, without criticism, by the cultured masses of our age. It not only fails to meet with any opposition from scientists, but it is on the whole from among these people that we find the firmest support. If the voices of Max Muller and others who attribute a different origin and meaning to religion occasionally resound, they pass unnoticed and unheard amid the general, unanimous recognition that on the whole religion is a manifestation of superstition and ignorance. Not long ago, at the beginning of the century, the most advanced people, even if like the Encyclopaedists[48] at the end of the last century they rejected Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy, did not deny that in general terms religion is, and has always been, a necessary condition of all men's lives. Without mentioning the Deists[49] such as Bernadin de Saint Pierre,[50] Diderot and Rousseau, there was Voltaire who erected a monument to God, and Robespierre who instituted a feast day in memory of the Highest Being. But in our day it has been resolved and accepted by the cultured masses (as always quick and eager to adopt the lowest possible concepts) that religion is only a particular phase in the development of mankind, and that it is now long outdated and interferes with progress. This is thanks to the frivolous and superficial teachings of Auguste

Comte,[51] a man who firmly believed, like the majority of Frenchmen, that there is no Christianity other than Catholicism, and who therefore saw the full realization of Christianity in Catholicism. It is now accepted that mankind has already lived through two phases, the religious and the metaphysical, and that it is now entering the third and highest phase, the scientific. It is accepted that any kind of religious manifestation among people is but a remnant of a spiritual organ belonging to man that was once necessary, but which has now long since lost all meaning and significance, like the fifth toe of a horse. And it is accepted that, as Democritus[52] thought in ancient times, and as our modern philosophers and religious historians claim, the essence of religion lies in the fear evoked before the unknown forces of nature, and in the recognition and worship of imaginary beings.

The recognition of the existence of an invisible supernatural being, or beings does not, and has not, always arisen from fear before the mysterious forces of nature. This has been testified by hundreds of the most advanced and highly educated people in the past such as Socrates,[53] Descartes,[54] Newton[55] and similar people today, whose admission of higher supernatural beings, or being, has certainly no origin in fear of mysterious forces. Besides this, the assertion that religion arose from people's superstitious fear before the incomprehensible forces of nature can really offer no answer to the main question: from where did people get this notion of an unknown, supernatural being?

If people were frightened of thunder and lightning they might well have feared thunder and lightning, but why did they invent an invisible, supernatural being such as Jupiter, who can be found somewhere or other, and who sometimes throws streaks of lightning at people?

If people were struck by the sight of death they might well have feared death, but why did they 'conjure up' the spirits of the dead, with whom they tried to enter into an imaginary relationship? People could hide from thunder, and they could run away from their fear of the sight of death, yet they invented an eternal and almighty being on whom they considered themselves dependent, as well as living spirits of the dead; and this they did for a variety of reasons other than fear. It is clearly in these reasons that the essence of what we call religion can be found. Moreover, any person who has experienced religious feelings at any time, even if it was in childhood, knows from experience that this feeling is always evoked, not by frightening external phenomena, but by something internal that has nothing in common with fear of the unknown forces of nature: by a consciousness of his own insignificance, aloneness and sinfulness. Thus, both from external observation and from personal experience, man can recognize that religion is not the worship of gods that have been evoked by a superstitious fear of nature's incomprehensible forces, characteristic of the human race only at a certain period of its development, but is something quite independent of both fear and level of education. This something cannot be annihilated by any

form of cultural development, since man's consciousness of his finite existence in an infinite universe, and of his sinfulness (that is, of not having fulfilled all he could and should have done) has always existed, and will always exist, as long as mankind continues to exist.

In actual fact anyone who grows out of the animal conditions of infancy and early childhood, during which time he is guided only by those demands that arise from his animal nature, and who has awoken to rational consciousness, cannot help noticing that every living thing around him renews itself, avoids self-destruction and steadfastly subordinates itself to the one definite eternal law. While he alone, recognizing himself as separate from the rest of the living world, is sentenced to death, to oblivion in the infinity of space and time, and to the tormenting awareness of his responsibility for his own actions, i.e. the consciousness that having acted badly he could have acted better. And, having realized this, any reasonable person is forced to stop and think, and to ask himself: what is the purpose of such a momentary, uncertain and vacillating existence in this eternal, well-defined and never-ending world? Man cannot escape this question when he enters into truly human existence.

This question invariably faces each individual, and everyone answers it in one way or another. It is the answer to this question that comprises the essence of all religions. The essence of any religion lies solely in the answer to the question: why do I exist,

and what is my relationship to the infinite universe that surrounds me?

The whole metaphysic of religion, all the teachings about deity, about the origin of the universe, all forms of external worship, are things generally accepted as religion, but which are really nothing but different characteristics consequent to religion that vary according to geographical, ethnic and historical conditions. From the most elevated to the most primitive, there is not one single religion that does not have as its basis the establishment of man's relationship to the universe around him, or to its first cause. There is not one religious rite however primitive, not one cult however refined, that can fail to have this very thing as its basis. All religious teaching is an expression of the religious attitude of the founder when he acknowledged his relationship as a man (and subsequently that of all other people) to the universe, or its origin and first cause.

The expressions of this relationship are very varied, according to the ethnic and geographical circumstances of the religious founder and of the nation adopting it. Moreover, all these expressions are invariably misinterpreted and perverted by the followers of these teachers, who themselves usually anticipated the comprehension of the masses by hundreds, sometimes thousands of years. Thus, these relationships between man and the universe, or its origin, i.e. religions, appear to be very numerous, although in truth there are

only three basic ones: (1) the primitive personal, (2) the pagan-social or family-State and (3) the Christian or divine.

Strictly speaking there are only two basic attitudes of man to the world: the personal, consisting of the recognition of the meaning of life as personal well-being, acquired independently or in conjunction with other individuals; and the Christian, which sees the meaning of life in service to Him who sent man into the world. The second attitude mentioned, the social one, is really only an extension of the first.

The first and most ancient of these relationships, and that which is nowadays found among people at the very lowest stage of development, consists in man regarding himself as a self-motivated being, who exists in the world for the purpose of attaining the greatest possible personal well-being, irrespective of the degree of suffering this may cause to others.

It is from this very basic relationship to the world, the position in which every infant finds himself upon entering life and in which humanity lived during its first, pagan period of development (and in which many isolated, amoral and primitive tribes still live today), that all the ancient pagan religions originated. Similarly this attitude was the origin of the lowest forms of subsequent religions in their perverted forms: Buddhism, Taoism, Mohammedanism and others. Modern spiritualism also arises from this relationship to the world, an attitude which has at its basis the preservation and happiness of the individual. All the pagan cults:

divination, idolization of beings that enjoy themselves as men, saints who intercede for man, sacrifices and prayers offered for man's earthly happiness and deliverance from misfortune, arise from this relationship to life.

The second pagan relationship between man and the universe, the social one which sets man on the second phase of his development, is an attitude mainly belonging to adults, and consists in recognizing the meaning of life, not in the well-being of one separate individual, but in the well-being of a certain aggregate of people: family, tribe, nation, State, or even humanity (the Positivist attempt at religion).

According to this relationship between man and the universe the meaning of life is transferred from the individual to the family, the tribe, the nation or the State – a certain aggregate of people whose well-being, from this point of view, is considered to be the purpose of existence. From this attitude follows the identifying characteristic of the patriarchal or social religions: the Chinese and Japanese religions, the religions of the 'Chosen People', or Jews, the Roman State Religion, our State religion, reduced to this level by Augustine and improperly called Christian, and the religion of Humanity proposed by the Positivists.[56] All the rites of ancestor worship in China and Japan, the worship of Emperors in Rome, all the complex Jewish rituals aimed at observing the agreement made between the 'chosen people' and God, all the domestic and all the public Church Christian prayers said for the prosperity of the

government and success in war, are founded on this relationship between man and the universe.

The third relationship between man and the universe, the Christian one of which all men are involuntarily aware, and into which in my opinion man is now moving, consists in man no longer recognizing the meaning of life in the fulfilment of personal ambitions, or the ambitions of any aggregate of people, but solely in service to the Will that created him, as well as the entire universe, for the purpose of achieving not his own aims, but the aims of that Will. This relationship to the universe leads to the highest religious teaching known to us, the seeds of which already existed among the Pythagoreans,[57] Therapeutae,[58] Essenes,[59] and among the Egyptians, Persians, Brahmins, Buddhists, and Taoists in their higher representatives, but which only received its complete and final expression in true and unperverted form, in Christianity.

From this perception of life arose all the rituals of the ancient religions, as well as the contemporary forms of external worship adopted by the Unitarians,[60] Universalists,[61] Quakers,[62] Serbian Nazarenes,[63] Russian Doukabars,[64] and the so-called rationalist sects whose sermons, hymns, discourses and books are at the heart of the religious manifestation of this relation between man and the universe.

Every kind of religion, whatever it may be, inevitably falls into one of these three categories defining man’s relation to the

universe.

Every man who emerges from his animal state necessarily recognizes one or other of these three relationships, and it is this recognition that constitutes each person's true religion, irrespective of which religious denomination he may nominally belong to.

Without fail everyone forms some relationship to the universe, since a rational being cannot live in the world that surrounds him without having some kind of relationship to it. And since we know as yet of only three relationships that man has formed with the universe, each person must inevitably adhere to one of the three existing ones, and – whether he likes it or not – belong to one of the three basic religions among which the entire human race is divided.

And therefore the very widespread assertion made by people belonging to the cultured masses of the Christian world, when they say that they have advanced to such a height of development that they no longer need or hold to any religion, is, in truth, no more than an indication that these people, in failing to recognize the Christian religion as the one true religion characteristic of our times, have, without realizing it, adhered to a lower form of religion, whether it be the socio-family State religion, or the pagan one. It is as impossible for there to be a person with no religion (i.e. without any kind of relationship to the world) as it is for there to be a person without a heart. He may not know that he has a religion, just as a person may not know that he has a heart, but it

is no more possible for a person to exist without a religion than without a heart.

Religion is the relationship a person recognizes himself to have with the external world, or with its origin and first cause, and a rational person cannot fail to have some kind of relationship to it.

But you may well say that the establishing of a relationship between man and the universe is not the concern of religion but of philosophy, or of science in general, if philosophy is to be regarded as a part of science. I do not think so. I believe quite the opposite, that to suggest that science as a whole, including philosophy can establish a relationship between man and the universe is entirely mistaken and is the main reason for the confusion in understanding religion, science and morality that exists among the cultured strata of our society.

Science, including philosophy, cannot establish man's relationship to the infinite universe, or towards its origin, if for no other reason than that before any kind of philosophy or science could come into existence there must have been that, without which it is impossible to have any kind of mental activity, or any kind of relationship whatsoever between man and the universe.

A person cannot discover through any sort of movement the direction in which he ought to move, and yet every movement is inevitably performed in some direction. In just the same way it is impossible in philosophy or science to use mental effort in order to determine the direction in which such efforts should be made, and

yet all mental effort is inevitably performed according to a given direction. It is religion that always indicates the direction of such mental effort. All the philosophers we know of, from Plato to Schopenhauer, have always and invariably pursued a direction that has been indicated to them by religion. The philosophy of Plato and his followers was the philosophy of *paganism*, and investigated the means of obtaining the greatest well-being either for the separate individual or for a group of individuals within the *State*. The medieval Church Christian philosophy which arose from this pagan conception of life investigated methods of personal salvation, i.e. the acquisition of the greatest well-being for the individual in the world to come, and only in its theocratic efforts did it touch on the organization of the welfare of society.

More recent philosophy, like Hegel's and Comte's,[65] has at its basis a politico-social religious understanding of life. The pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer and Hartmann,[66] while aiming to be free of the Jewish religious outlook, involuntarily arrives at the religious premises of Buddhism. Philosophy always has been, and always will be, merely an investigation of things that stem from an established religious attitude between man and the universe. Therefore, until that relationship is established there is no material for philosophical investigation.

It is exactly the same with positive science, in the strictest meaning of the word. This science always was, and will be, no more than an investigation and study of all those objects and

phenomena that appear to demand investigation as a result of a certain relationship established between man and the universe.

Science has always been, and always will be, not the study of 'everything', as today's scientists naïvely believe (this is impossible, for there is an incalculable number of objects subject to inquiry), but is merely a study of those things put forward by religion, in strict order according to their degree of importance, from an incalculable quantity of objects, phenomena and conditions demanding investigation. There is, therefore, not one science but as many sciences as there are religions. Each religion selects a certain group of objects that demand investigation, with the result that science of each different period, and each different people, inevitably bears the stamp of the religion, from which point of view the object is being regarded.

Thus it is that pagan science, reinstated during the time of the Renaissance and now flourishing in our society under the name of Christianity, always was, and continues to be, no more than an examination of all those conditions conducive to man's greatest well-being, and of all the phenomena in the universe that can help attain it. The Brahmin and Buddhist philosophical science has never been more than an investigation into those conditions under which man can free himself from the burden of his suffering. European science (Talmud) has never been anything but the study and explanation of those conditions which man must observe in order to fulfil his contract with God and to maintain the chosen

people at the height of their vocation. The Church Christian science was, and is, an examination of those conditions by which man's salvation can be achieved. The science of true Christianity, which is only now emerging, is an inquiry into those conditions under which man can comprehend the demands of the higher will of his Creator and apply them to his life.

Neither philosophy nor science is able to establish man's relationship to the universe, because this relationship must be established before any kind of philosophy or science can begin. A further reason it cannot do so is because science, including philosophy, investigates phenomena rationally, and independently of the position of the person making the investigation, or of the feelings he experiences. But a man's relationship to the world is determined not just by his intellect but by his feelings and by his whole aggregate of spiritual forces. However much one implies or explains to a person that all that truly exists is no more than an idea, or that everything is made up of atoms, or that the essence of life is substance or will, or that heat, light, movement and electricity are only manifestations of one and the same energy; however much you explain this to a man – a being who feels, suffers, rejoices, fears and hopes – it will not explain his place in the universe. This place, and consequently his relationship to the world, can only be shown to him by religion, which says: the world exists for you, therefore take all that you can get from this life. Or: you are a member of God's chosen people, carry out all God's instructions and you and your people will attain the greatest

possible well-being. Or: you are an instrument of a higher Will that has sent you into the world to fulfil an appointed task, know that Will and fulfil it, and you will be doing the best thing possible for yourself.

Preparation and study are required in order to understand philosophical and scientific information, but this is not true of religion: it is immediately accessible to all, including the most narrow-minded and ignorant people.

In order for a person to comprehend his relationship to the universe surrounding him, or to its origin, he needs neither philosophic or scientific knowledge (an abundance of knowledge encumbering the consciousness is liable to be an impediment to this) but needs only to temporarily renounce the vanities of the world, and to be conscious of his material insignificance and of the truth – things which, as the Evangelists say, are more frequently met with among children and among very simple and barely educated people. From this we see that it is often the very simple, unlearned and uneducated people who can quite lucidly, consciously and easily grasp the highest Christian concepts of life, while educated and cultured people continue to stagnate in extremely crude paganism. Thus, for instance, we can see the most refined and highly educated people suggesting that the meaning of life lies in personal happiness, or in avoiding suffering, as did the highly intelligent and well-educated Schopenhauer; or in the salvation of the soul through the Sacraments and grace, as

proposed by very highly educated bishops. And yet the semi-illiterate Russian peasant religious sectarian can, without any mental effort, see that the meaning of life lies in the acknowledgement of oneself as the son of God and instrument of His will – the very thing proposed by the greatest sages of the world: Epictetus,[67] Marcus Aurelius[68] and Seneca.[69]

But you may ask me: what is the essence of this unscientific and unphilosophical method of comprehension? If it is neither philosophical nor scientific, what is it? How can it be defined? The only reply I can make to this is that, since religious knowledge is the thing on which all else depends, and which presupposes any other kind of knowledge, we cannot define it because we have no instruments with which to make the definition. In religious terminology this comprehension is called 'revelation'. Without ascribing any mystical significance to this word it is perfectly correct, since this understanding is not acquired through any study or effort on the part of any particular person, or people, but only through acceptance by a person, or people, of the manifestation of infinite reason which is gradually revealing itself to mankind.

Why is it that 10,000 years ago men were unable to understand that the meaning of life is not restricted to the well-being of the individual, and why did a time come when a higher understanding of life – the family, social, national, state understanding – was revealed to them? Why was the Christian conception of life disclosed to one particular person, or people, and not another?

And why at one particular time, and in one particular form and not another? To try to answer these questions by searching for reasons in the historical conditions of the time, or in the lives and temperaments of those who first assumed this understanding of life and expressed it in their own characteristic ways, is as useless as trying to provide an answer to the question of why the rising sun illuminates some objects before others. As the sun of truth rises higher and higher over the world it increasingly illuminates it, reflecting those objects which are the first to fall beneath the sun's rays and which are best able to reflect them. But the attributes that make some people more capable than others of receiving the rising truth are not any especial active qualities of the mind but, on the contrary, are passive qualities of the soul that rarely coexists with the great and curious intellect: renunciation of the vanities of the world, and recognition of our material insignificance and of the truth, as we can see in all religious founders in no way distinguished by either philosophical or scientific learning.

In my opinion the chief error, and the one that more than any other impedes the true progress of our Christian people, lies precisely in the fact that the scientists of our time, now seated on the throne of Moses, are guided by the pagan view of life that was reinstated at the time of the Renaissance. They have accepted as the essence of Christianity something that is a very coarse perversion of it, and have decided that Christianity is a condition that people have outlived, while at the same time, adhering to the ancient pagan social-State understanding of life, which mankind

has truly outlived, as the very highest understanding of life and the one that mankind must unwaveringly hold on to. Thus they not only fail to understand the truth of Christianity, which comprises the highest understanding of life towards which man is moving, but they do not even attempt to understand it. The chief source of this understanding lies in the fact that the scientists, recognizing the incongruity between their science and Christianity, have divorced themselves from Christianity and decided that it is to blame and not their science. In other words they imagine something other than the truth: that is, they believe that Christianity is 1,800 years behind science, whereas the truth is that science is 1,800 years behind Christianity, which already influences a large part of contemporary society.

This reversal of roles leads to the startling fact that no one is more confused in understanding the essence and true significance of religion, morality and life than are the scientists; and to the even more startling fact that science today, while achieving truly substantial success in the sphere of its investigations into the material conditions of the universe, has revealed itself as not just unnecessary when it comes to human life, but as sometimes leading to adverse effects.

Therefore I do not believe there is any kind of philosophy or science that can establish man’s relationship to the universe, but only religion.

And thus, to your first question concerning what I understood by religion, I reply: religion is the relationship man establishes between himself and the infinite, never-ending universe, or its origin and first cause.

The reply to the second question follows automatically from this reply to the first:

If religion is the establishing of a relationship between man and the universe, defining the meaning of life, then morality is the indication and explanation of those activities which automatically result when a person maintains one or other relationship to the universe. And since, if we regard the pagan and social attitudes as extensions of the personal, there are only two basic attitudes, or three if we regard the pagan, social relationship separately, there are only three kinds of teaching on morality: the primitive, savage and personal; the pagan, family-State teaching; and the moral or divine teachings of Christianity, i.e. of service to man or to God.

From the first of these three relationships between man and the universe follows the moral teaching common to all pagan religions that have as their basis a striving for the well-being of the separate individual, and the subsequent definitions of the conditions conducive to the greatest well-being of the individual, and explanations as to the best way of achieving this. Certain moral teachings follow from this relationship to the world: Epicureanism in its basest form, the moral teaching of Mohammedanism, which promises personal well-being in this world and the next, the moral

teaching of the Christain Church, aiming at salvation i.e. personal well-being chiefly in the world to come, and the moral teaching of the Utilitarians, which aims at personal well-being in this world only.

This very same attitude, holding the purpose of life to lie in individual well-being and thereby in freedom from personal suffering, gives rise to the moral doctrines of Buddhism in its crudest form, and to the worldly doctrine of the Pessimists.[70]

The second, pagan relationship between man and the universe, where the purpose of life is held to lie in the well-being of a particular group of individuals, gives rise to a moral doctrine that requires a person to serve that group whose well-being is recognized as the purpose of life. This doctrine admits the function of personal well-being, but only to the extent that it can be obtained for the whole of the group which comprises the religious basis of life. From this relationship to the world follow the well-known moral doctrines of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, where the individual always sacrifices itself to society. Jewish morality – the subordination of one's own well-being to the welfare of the Chosen People – originates from this relationship, as does the Church State morality of our own time, demanding the sacrifice of the individual for the welfare of the State, and the morality of most women, who sacrifice their well-being for that of the family, or more especially of the children.

The whole of ancient history and to some extent modern history, is full of descriptions of this family-social and State morality. In our day the majority of people only imagine that because they profess Christianity they support Christian morality, whereas in reality they are pursuing no more than this family-State morality, i.e. pagan morality, and it is this that they hold up as the ideal when educating the younger generation.

From the third, Christian relationship to the world, which consists in man's recognizing himself as an instrument for fulfilling the aims of a higher will, follow the moral teachings that correspond to this understanding of life and clarify the dependence of man on the higher will, defining its demands. All the highest moral teachings known to man stem from this relationship: the highest manifestations of the Pythagorean,[71] Stoic,[72] Buddhist, Brahmin and Taoist religions, and Christianity in its true sense. They all demand the abdication of the individual will, and of the well-being, not just of the individual, but of family, society and State, in the name of fulfilling the will revealed to us by our awareness of Him who has given us life. The genuine, non-hypocritical morality of every person, irrespective of what he nominally professes or preaches as morality, or of how he wishes to be seen, arises from either the first, second or third of these relationships between man and the universe, or its origin.

Thus, however much a person who considers the essence of his relationship to the world to be the acquisition of the greatest

personal well-being says that he considers it moral to live for the family, for society, for the State, for humanity or for the fulfilment of God's will, and however much he skilfully pretends and deceives people, the true motivation behind his behaviour will always be nothing other than his own personal well-being. When this person is faced with having to make a choice he will not sacrifice his own personality for the family or for the government, or for the fulfilment of God's will, but will sacrifice them all to himself because, if he sees the meaning of life only in personal well-being, he cannot behave otherwise until he alters his relationship to the universe.

Similarly, however much a person whose relationship to the universe consists in service to his family (as with the majority of women), or his tribe, nation or state (as with the members of oppressed nations, or political figures in time of war), however much this person may say that he is a Christian, his morality will always be of the family, nation or State variety, and not Christian. When he is faced with having to choose between the welfare of the family, or society, and his own personal well-being, or between the welfare of society and the fulfilment of God's will, he will invariably choose service to the well-being of that group of people for whom, according to his way of looking at the world, he exists; for it is only in this service that he finds meaning in life. It is the same with a person who assumes his relationship to the world to lie in the fulfilment of the will of Him who gave him life. However much you may try to impress upon him that, in accordance to the

needs of his own self, or his family, nation or government, or of all humanity, he should commit acts contrary to that higher will by which he is made aware of the reason and love endowed within him, this person will always sacrifice himself, his family, his fatherland and all humanity in order not to act against the will of Him that sent him here; for it is only in the fulfilment of this will that he can see a meaning in life.

Morality cannot be independent of religion, since it is not only a consequence of religion – that is, of the relationship a person has to the world – but it is also included in religion by implication. Every religion is an answer to the question of the meaning of life. And the religious answer includes a certain moral demand which sometimes follows and sometimes precedes the explanation of life's meaning. It is possible to reply to the question as follows: the meaning of life lies in personal well-being, therefore make use of any good fortune available to you. Or, the meaning of life lies in the well-being of an aggregate of people, therefore serve this group with all your strength. Or: the meaning of life lies in the fulfilment of the will of Him who gave you life, therefore strive as hard as you can to know that will and to fulfil it. Or the same question can be answered in this way: the meaning of your life lies in your own personal enjoyment and that is the purpose of man's life. Or: the meaning of your life lies in service to that group of people of which you count yourself a member, therefore that is your purpose; or: the meaning of your life lies in service to God, therefore that is your purpose.

Morality is included in the explanation of life given by religion and can in no sense be separated from religion. This truth is especially evident in those attempts made by non-Christian philosophers to deduce a doctrine of high morality from their philosophy. These philosophers realize that Christian morality is essential and that it is impossible to live without it, moreover, having realized that it exists, they wish to merge it with their non-Christian philosophy and even to present things in such a way that Christian morality appears to emerge from their pagan, or social philosophy. They try to do this, but it is precisely these attempts that show more clearly than anything else that not only is Christian morality independent of pagan philosophy, but it is directly opposed to both social philosophy and to the philosophy of personal well-being, or personal liberation from suffering.

The Christian ethic – that which we acknowledge as a consequence of our world outlook – demands not just the sacrifice of the individual to the individuality of the group, but demands the renunciation of both personal and group individuality for service to God. Pagan philosophy only explores the means of acquiring the greatest well-being for the individual, or for a group of individuals, and the contradiction is inevitable. The only method of concealing this contradiction is to accumulate abstract conditional concepts one on top of the other, and to avoid departing from the nebulous sphere of metaphysics. This is what the majority of philosophers have done since the time of the Renaissance, and it is to this circumstance – the impossibility of reconciling the previously

accepted demands of Christian philosophy with a moral philosophy based on paganism – that one must attribute the peculiar abstraction, lack of clarity, unintelligibility and irrelevance to life, of modern philosophy. With the exception of Spinoza, whose philosophy, despite the fact that he did not consider himself a Christian, is derived from religious foundations that are sincerely Christian, and of Kant, who presented his ethics as being quite independent of his metaphysics, all other philosophers, even the brilliant Schopenhauer, evidently invented artificial links between their ethics and their metaphysics.

It seems that the Christian ethic is something we have always had and that it stands quite firmly and independently of philosophy, with no need of fictitious supports to hold it up, while philosophy merely invents certain clauses which cannot be contradicted by ethical data and binds itself to the ethic as if that is where it originates. All such clauses appear to justify the Christian ethic, but only so long as they are being examined in the abstract. The moment they are applied to problems concerning practical life, not only does disagreement arise but a blatant contradiction between the philosophical premises and what we regard as morality emerges in full force.

The unfortunate Nietzsche, who has lately become so famous, made a valuable exposition of this contradiction. He cannot be refuted when he says that from the point of view of existing non-Christian philosophies all laws of morality are mere lies and

hypocrisy, and that it is far more pleasant and reasonable for a man to create his own fellowship of supermen and to be one of them, than to be one of the crowd that serves as the stage for these supermen. None of the philosophical arguments stemming from a religious view of life that is pagan can prove to a person that it is more advantageous and reasonable not to live for his own well-being, which he desires, understands, finds possible, or for the well-being of his family, or society, but for the well-being that is unknown, undesired, incomprehensible and unattainable by human means. A philosophy founded on an understanding of human life and confined to the welfare of man will never be in a position to prove to a rational person, who knows that he might die at any moment, that it is good for him and that he must deny himself his own desired, appreciated, and undoubted well-being, and do so not for the good of others (because he will never know the results of his sacrifices) but simply because it is necessary and worthy, and a categorical imperative.

It is not possible to prove this from the point of view of pagan philosophy. In order to prove that all men are equal and that it is better for a man to give his own life in service to others than to compel others to serve him, thereby trampling on their lives, the relationship to the world must be defined in another way: it must be shown that man's position is such that there is nothing else he can do, since the meaning of life is found only in fulfilling the will of Him who sent him here; and the will of Him who sent him is that he should give his life to the service of others. It is only

religion that can bring about this sort of change in man's relationship to the universe.

The same occurs when attempts are made to deduce a Christian morality from, and to reconcile it with, the basic tenets of pagan science. No kind of sophism or twists of thought can undermine the simple and clear proposition that the law of evolution, which lies at the basis of contemporary science, is based on the general, eternal and unalterable law of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest; a law saying that each person, in order to attain his own well-being and that of his group, must be one of the fittest and make sure that his group is the same, so that it is not his group but another, less fit, that perishes.

However hard some naturalists, who are frightened by this law and by its application to life, have tried to stifle the issue with words and to refute the law, their efforts only make the irresistibility of the ruler governing the life of the entire organic world (thereby making man seem an animal) more apparent.

Just as I was writing this a translation came out in Russia of an article by Mr Huxley,[73] consisting of a speech on evolution and ethics which he gave not long ago to some English society.

In the paper the learned Professor tries to prove (like many, including our Professor Bartkov, who wrote on the subject a few years ago with as little success as his predecessors) that the struggle for existence does not transgress morality and that in accepting the law of the struggle for existence as a fundamental

law of life it is possible for morality not just to exist, but to reach perfection. Mr Huxley's paper is crammed full of jokes, verses and generalized views on the religion and philosophy of the ancient people, resulting in an argument so ornate and involved that it takes the greatest effort to reach the basic idea within it. The idea, however, is as follows: the law of evolution is contrary to the law of morality, and this was known to the ancient peoples of both Greece and India. The philosophy and religion of both these peoples led them to the doctrine of self-renunciation. In the author's opinion, the doctrine is mistaken and the correct one is as follows: a law exists, which the author calls the cosmic law, according to which all living creatures fight among themselves and only the fittest survive. Man is also subject to this law and it is only thanks to it that man has developed to the extent he has. But the law is contrary to morality. How can it be reconciled with morality? This is how: something exists called social progress which strives to restrain cosmic progress and to replace it with another, i.e. ethical progress, the aim of which is the survival not of the fittest but of the best, in an ethical sense. Mr Huxley does not elucidate on the derivations of this ethical progress, but in his note, no. 19, he says that its basis consists, on the one hand, of the fact that people live like animals, that they love company and therefore suppress their anti-social tendencies, and, on the other hand, that members of a society use force to suppress behaviour that is opposed to society's welfare. It seems to Mr Huxley that this process, forcing men to curb their passions in order to preserve the

group of which they are members, and the fear of being punished for violating the order of the group, is precisely the ethic he wished to prove exists.

Mr Huxley, in the innocence of his heart, thinks that in contemporary English society, with its problems of Ireland, the poverty of the masses and ridiculous wealth of the rich, its trade in spirits and opium, its death sentence, its slaughter and extermination of men for the benefit of trade and politics, and its concealed depravity and hypocrisy – that in this society the man who breaks the police regulations is the moral person, guided by an ethical law. He forgets that the qualities which might be needed in order not to violate that society in which the person lives might be very useful to it, in the way that the qualities of a robber are very useful to a gang of robbers, and in our society the qualities of executioners, gaolers, judges, soldiers and hypocritical priests etc. are useful, although they have nothing in common with morality.

Morality is something that is continually growing and unfolding, therefore the non-violation of the established order of a particular society, and its upkeep by means of gallows and axes, of which Mr Huxley speaks as if they were the instruments of morality, will not only fail to affirm morality but will infringe on it.

On the other hand, any violation of the existing order, such as infringements not just of the kind made by Jesus Christ and his disciples against the order of the Roman Empire, but such as the

violation of today's order by a person who refuses to participate in legal proceedings, in military service, in the payment of taxes demanded for arms manufacture, will not be immoral and moreover, will be an essential condition of the manifestation of morality. Any cannibal who ceases to eat his fellow men and who behaves in a manner supporting this, will violate the order of his society. And therefore deeds which transgress the order of any society can be immoral, but it is indisputable that any genuinely moral deed advancing morality will always be a violation of the practices of the society. And so, if a law appears within a society according to which people must sacrifice their own advantages in order to support the whole of the society, then that law is not an ethical law but, to a large extent, the opposite: a law contrary to all ethics, which is the same law of the struggle for existence only in a discreet, latent form. It is the same struggle for existence, only it has been extended from the single person to the group. It is not the end of the struggle but a show of arms made in order to strike all the harder.

If the law of the struggle for the existence and survival of the fittest is the eternal law of the living (and it must be recognized as such when man is regarded as an animal), then this law cannot be infringed upon by any ornate arguments about social progress, or about an ethical code that is supposed to emanate from it, or to spring up from nowhere, like a 'dues ex machina', whenever needed.

If, as Mr Huxley assures us, social progress groups people together, then the very same struggle and survival of the fittest will continue among families, clans and nations; and not only will the struggle fail to be any more moral, but it will be still more cruel and immoral than the personal struggle, as we witness in reality.

Even if we accept the impossible and believe that in a thousand years social progress alone will have united the whole of humanity in one entity which will form a single state, with a single government, even then one must not forget that the struggle between nations and States that will have been abolished will turn into a struggle between the human and the animal kingdom. The struggle will always remain the struggle, i.e. an activity that fundamentally excludes the possibility of adopting the Christian morality we profess. Neither must we forget that even then the struggle between the individual members of a group, and between the groups – families, clans, States – will in no way diminish, but will continue in a different form, as we can see in all the aggregates of people gathered together in families, clans or States. Families argue and fight among themselves in just the same way as outsiders do, and often much more, and with greater malice.

It is just the same in a State: the very same struggle continues among people living in a State as among people living outside one, only in a different form. In one instance they kill with arrows and knives, in the other with starvation. If the weakest, both

within the family and the State, are sacred it is certainly not as a result of political union but because there is self-sacrifice and love among people united in a family or a State. If between two children who are not members of a family only the fittest survives, while in a family with a good mother both remain alive, this is certainly not the result of being formed into family units, but because the mother has qualities of self-sacrifice and love. But neither self-sacrifice, nor love, can result from social progress.

To allege that social progress produces morality is the same as suggesting that the construction of stoves produces heat.

Heat is produced by the sun: stoves can only produce heat when they have wood inside them, i.e. a product of the sun. Morality proceeds from religion in just the same way. Only when the result of religious influence, namely morality, is made a part of people can social forms of life lead to morality.

Stoves can be burnt and then they give off heat, or they can not be burnt and they remain cold. In exactly the same way social forms of life may contain morality and then morality influences society, or they may not contain morality and society remains without any moral influence.

Christian morality cannot be based on a pagan conception of life, and it cannot be deduced from either philosophy or science if they are non-Christian. Not only can it not be deduced, but neither can it be reconciled with them.

This is how all serious, consistent and rigorous philosophy and science has understood the matter: ‘If our propositions do not accord with morality, so much the worse for morality.’ And philosophy and science are perfectly correct in saying this and in pursuing their investigations.

Ethical treatises with no religious basis and lay catechisms are written and taught and people may well think that humanity is guided by them, but this only appears so because, in reality, people are guided more by the religion they have always had, and still have, while these treatises and catechisms counterfeit things that flow automatically from religion.

The instructions of a secular morality that is not based on religious doctrines are exactly like what a person ignorant of music might do, if he were made a conductor and started to wave his hands in front of musicians well-rehearsed in what they are performing. By virtue of its own momentum, and from what previous conductors had taught the musicians, the music might continue for a while, but obviously the gesticulations made with a stick by a person who knows nothing about music would be useless and eventually confuse the musicians and throw the orchestra off course. This sort of confusion is beginning to take place in the minds of people today, as a result of the attempts made by leading figures to instruct people in a morality that is not based on that superior religion which Christian humanity has started, and to some extent succeeded, in assimilating.

It is truly desirable that moral teaching should not be adulterated by superstition, but the truth of the matter is that moral teaching is only a result of a particular relationship established between man and the universe, or God. If the establishment of such a relationship is expressed in forms we feel to be superstitious, then in order to avoid this we must strive to express it more reasonably, clearly and precisely, or even to destroy the previously established relationship between man and the universe that is now inadequate, and replace it with one that is more reasonable, clear and precise. But we must never concoct a so-called secular, semi-religious morality, founded on sophism, or on nothing at all.

Attempts to found a morality outside religion are similar to what children do when, wishing to replant something they like, they tear it out without the roots and plant it, rootless, in the soil. There can be no genuine, non-hypocritical morality that is without a religious basis, just as there can be no plant without roots.

And so, in reply to your two questions, I say: religion is a particular relationship that man establishes between his own separate personality and the infinite universe, or its origin. And morality is the permanent guide to life that follows from this relationship.

# THE LAW OF LOVE AND THE LAW OF VIOLENCE[74]

‘And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.’ (Matt., X, 28)

‘Because of the perversion of the Christian way of life, the Christian people have become worse than the pagans.’

‘The reform of evil that exists in life must begin with a denunciation of the religious lie and the establishing of religious truth within each individual person.’

‘The sufferings involved in an irrational life lead to an awareness of the necessity of rational life.’

‘None of the wretchedness of either humanity or the individual is useless, for it always leads humanity, albeit in a roundabout way, to the only activity for which man is destined: self-perfection.’

## PREFACE

‘And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.’ (John, III, 19–21)

‘There is no greater unhappiness than when a person starts to fear the truth lest it denounce him.’ (Pascal[75])

‘The glory of the good lies in their consciences and not in the mouths of other people.’

I write what I am writing simply because, knowing the only thing that can free the people of the Christian world from the terrible physical sufferings, and more importantly, from the spiritual

corruption into which they are submerging themselves ever deeper, I, as I stand on the edge of the grave, cannot be silent.

It must be apparent to all thinking people of our times, not only to the Russian people but to all the Christian nations of the world that with the continually increasing hardship of the poor and luxuriant living of the rich, with the struggle of all against all, revolutionaries against governments, governments against revolutionaries, enslaved nationalities against their oppressors, struggles between States, between East and West, together with the progressive development of armaments devouring the strength of the people with its refinement and depravity, this sort of life cannot continue, and that if the life of the Christian peoples does not change it will inevitably become ever more wretched.

This is clear to most people but, unfortunately, they frequently fail to see the cause of this disastrous situation and are still less able to see the means of salvation. A number of very different circumstances are given as the cause, and the most varied means of salvation are suggested. And yet there is only one cause and one means of salvation.

The reason behind this disastrous condition of the Christian nations is the absence among them of a higher understanding of the meaning of life, of a faith common to all, and the guidance for conduct that follows from it.

The means of deliverance from this calamitous situation is neither fantastic nor artificial, but extremely natural. It lies in the

people of Christendom adopting the superior understanding of life that was revealed to them nineteen centuries ago and which is still relevant to the present age, together with the guidance for conduct that flows from it: in other words *the Christian teaching in its true meaning*.

# CHAPTER 1

> ‘One of the most obtuse superstitions is the superstition of the scientists who say that man can exist without faith.’
>
> ‘True religion is the establishment of a relationship between man and the infinite life that surrounds him, and which binds his life to this infinity and guides his actions.’
>
> ‘If you feel that you have no faith, you must understand that you are in the most dangerous position in the world, in which only man can find himself.’

People can, and do, live the rational and harmonious life natural to man only when they are united by their understanding of the meaning of life; in other words by a shared understanding of the meaning of life that satisfies the majority of people equally, and in the guidance for conduct that follows from it. But when the inevitable happens (which must happen since the explanation of the meaning of life and the resulting guidance for conduct is never finalized but becomes continually clearer) – when it happens that the understanding of the meaning of life, having become more precise and definite, demands a code of conduct that differs from before, while the life of the people, or of nations, continues as before, then their lives become discordant and impoverished. And the disparity and impoverishment continue to increase so long as the people fail to assimilate a religious comprehension and code of conduct appropriate to their times, but continue living according to guidance originating from a former, now outdated, understanding of life, and moreover try to adopt a religious outlook appropriate to the times by inventing an artificial

understanding of life that might justify their way of life, but which no longer corresponds to the spiritual demands of the majority of them.

This has been repeated many times in history, but never, I believe, has there been such discord between people's way of life and their outdated religious explanation of life's meaning and resulting guidance for conduct, as there is now among the Christian nations who have not accepted the Christian doctrine revealed to them in its true meaning, but who live and continue to live their previous pagan existence.

I think this discord in the life of the Christian nations is particularly great because the explanation of the meaning of life that Christianity brought to men's consciousness went far beyond the lifestyle of those who adopted it. The consequence of this was that the resulting guidance for conduct was too contradictory, not only to people's habits, but to the whole mode of life of the pagan nations who accepted the Christian teaching.

This led to the striking disparity, immorality, impoverishment and folly of the way of life of the Christian nations.

It arose because the men of the Christian world, having accepted beneath the guise of Christianity a Church teaching which in its basic tenets differs from paganism only in its lack of sincerity and artificiality, very soon ceased to believe in the teaching and did not replace it with another. Thus the people of Christendom, having systematically liberated themselves from belief in the

distorted Christian teachings, have finally reached the position in which they now find themselves wherein the majority of people have no explanation of the meaning of life: in other words, no religion, faith or common code of conduct. The largest section of the people, the working class, while externally following the old Church religion, no longer believe in it and are no longer guided by it; they simply cling to it out of habit, tradition and a sense of propriety. However on the whole the minority, the so-called educated classes, have either consciously ceased to believe in anything, or pretend, as some do, to believe in Christianity for political motives, or like the minute minority, sincerely believe in a teaching that is incompatible with life and lags behind it, and try to justify it through all sorts of complicated sophistries.

This is the chief and singular cause of the persisting state of misfortune in which today's Christian nations find themselves. The miserable situation is worsened by the fact that, since this state of non-belief has already persisted for such a long time, the members of the Christian world for whom the position of non-belief is advantageous (all the ruling classes) either unscrupulously pretend to believe in something they do not believe in and cannot believe in, or else (and this is particularly true among the most corrupt of them, the scholars) they openly preach that the people of our time have absolutely no need of any explanation of the meaning of life, or of faith, or of any code of conduct resulting from it, and that the only fundamental law of life is the law of evolution and struggle

for existence, and therefore human life should and must be guided only by human passions and desires.

The reason behind the misery of the people of the Christian world is the unconscious disbelief of the people, and the conscious denial of faith by the so-called educated men of the world.

## CHAPTER 2

> ‘Man possesses a certain tendency to believe that he is not seen when he sees nothing, like children who close their eyes in order not to be seen.’
>
> (Lichtenberg[76])
>
> ‘Men of our times believe that none of the absurdity and cruelty of our lives, with the ridiculous wealth of a few and the embittered poverty of the majority, and the arms and wars, is seen by anyone and that nothing prevents them from continuing such a life.’
>
> ‘Wrong does not cease to be wrong because the majority share in it.’

Men of the Christian world, having accepted under the guise of Christian teaching a perversion of it compiled by the Church, which replaced paganism and at first partially satisfied people by its new forms, have ceased with time to believe in this perverted Church Christianity, and have finally reached the point where they are left without any kind of religious understanding of life, or guidance for conduct resulting from it. And since, without this understanding of life and behavioural guidance common, if not to all, then to the majority of people, human life is bound to be irrational and wretched, the longer such an existence continues among the peoples of the Christian world, the more irrational and wretched their life becomes. And today life has reached such a level of irrationality and wretchedness that it cannot continue in its previous forms.

The majority of the working people, deprived of land and consequently of the possibility of enjoying the fruits of their labour, hate the landowners and capitalists who hold them in

servitude. The landowners and capitalists, knowing how the workers feel about them, fear and detest them and hold them in servitude with the help of organized governmental force. And as the situation of the workers continues to deteriorate, their dependence on the rich increases; and as the rich grow richer their power, fear and loathing of the working populace increases in equal proportion. And there is the same steady increase in the arming of nation against nation, and the expenditure of more and more of the servile worker's labour on land, water, submarine and air forces, with the sole purpose of preparing for international wholesale slaughter. And this slaughter has been, and is, committed, and cannot but be committed, since all the Christian peoples (not individually, but as nations) are united in States that hate both one another and the other non-Christian States, and are prepared to attack one another at any moment. Moreover, there is not one large Christian State which, following some unnecessary patriotic tradition, does not hold one or several smaller nations in its power against their will, compelling them to participate in the life of the larger State they hate: Austria, Prussia, England, Russia, France, with their subject nations: Poland, Ireland, India, Finland, Caucasus, Algeria, etc. Thus, apart from the growing hatred between poor and rich and between the large nations, there is an ever-increasing hatred between the oppressed nations and their subjugators. What is worst of all is that all this hatred, which is so contrary to human nature (as for instance between the larger nations and between the subjected and the subjugators), is not

only not condemned like all other malicious sentiments between people, but, quite the opposite, it is praised and elevated as laudable service and virtue. The hatred of the oppressed workers for the rich and powerful is extolled as love of liberty, brotherhood and equality. The hatred of the Germans for the French and the English, and of the English for the Yankees, and of the Russians for the Japanese, etc., and vice versa, is considered the virtue of patriotism. Likewise, and even more highly valued, is the patriotic hatred the Poles have for the Russians and Prussians, and the Prussians for the Poles and Finns, and vice versa.

That is not all. All these expressions of malice do not even demonstrate that the life of the Christian nations cannot continue in this direction. These evil sentiments could be incidental, temporary phenomena if among these nations there were some kind of religious guiding principle shared by all. But there is not; there is nothing even resembling a common religious guiding principle among the Christian nations of the world. There is the lie of Church religion, and not just one but various different ones contending with one another: the Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and so forth; there is the lie of science, again, several different ones contending with one another; there is the lie of politics on both an international and a party level: there are the lies of art, of traditions and customs. There are a great many widely differing lies, but there is no guidance, no moral guidance, stemming from a religious outlook on the world. And the people of the Christian world live like animals, guided in life by nothing other than

personal interests and mutual strife; and they are only differentiated from animals by the fact that since time immemorial animals have kept the same stomachs, claws and fangs, while humanity moves, ever more rapidly, from dirt roads to railroads, from horses to steam, from spoken sermons and letters to the printing press, telegraph and telephone; from sailing boats to ocean liners; from side arms to gunpowder, cannons, machine guns, bombs and bomber planes. And life with telegraphs, telephones, electricity, bombs and aeroplanes, and with enmity between all peoples, who are guided not by some unifying spiritual principle but by alienating animal instincts, and who use intellectual faculties for their own pleasure, is becoming more and more futile and calamitous.

# CHAPTER 3

> ‘Those who think that there is no other way of governing people than by force, ignoring their reason, do to man what is done to horses when they are blinkered in order to make them walk around the circle more submissively.’
>
> ‘Why does man have reason if he can only be influenced by violence?’
>
> ‘The law of violence is not a law, but a simple fact which can only be a law when it does not meet with protest and opposition. It is like the cold, darkness and weight, which people had to put up with until recently when warmth, illumination and leverage were discovered. All human industry is liberation from the power of raw nature; progress in justice is nothing other than a series of limitations to which the tyranny of the mighty must be subjected. Just as a medicine achieves victory in a sick person, goodness achieves victory over the blind atrocities and the unbridled lust of animal-men. In the same way, I can always see one and the same law developing personal freedom and the ascent of all life’s creatures to goodness, justice and wisdom. Greedy avarice is the point of departure; rational magnaminity is the point of achievement.’ (Amiel[77])
>
> ‘From the fact that it is possible to submit people to justice, it certainly does not follow that it can be just to submit people to violence.’ (Pascal[78])
>
> ‘Violence produces something only resembling justice, but it distances people from the possibility of living justly, without violence.’

The majority of people in the Christian world sense the increasing wretchedness of their situation and, in order to free themselves, they use the only means which according to their outlook is considered effective. This method is the use of violence exerted by some over others. Some people, who consider the existing order to be advantageous to themselves, try to maintain this order through the use of political measures, while others use the violence of revolutionary activity to try to destroy the existing order and erect another, better one in its place.

There have been many revolutions and many suppressions of revolutions in the Christian world. The external forms have altered but the essential structure of the State – the power of a few over many, the corruption, the lies, the fear of the ruling classes for the oppressed, the submission, enslavement, torpor and embitterment of the masses – even if altered in form has not only not diminished in reality, but has noticeably increased and is still increasing. What is now happening in Russia shows particularly clearly not just the aimlessness but the manifest perniciousness of employing violence as a means of uniting people.

In recent times all the newspapers have produced less and less news of things like where and how such and such a cash-box was robbed, assassinations of constables, officers and policemen, discoveries of plots and so on; but in all of them one finds, with increasing frequency, news of executions and death-sentences.

For the last year or two they have been shooting and hanging people ceaselessly; thousands have been strangled and shot. There are also thousands who have been killed and blown apart by revolutionary bombs; but, since the number who have recently been killed by the rulers has grown larger and larger, and the number killed by the revolutionaries smaller and smaller, the ruling classes are triumphant and feel they have won and can now resume their usual way of life, upholding deceit through violence, violence through deceit.

The essence of the mistake of all political doctrines, from the most conservative to the most advanced, which has led people to this unfortunate situation, lies in the fact that the people of this world have considered, and still consider, that it is possible, through violence, to unite people in such a way that everyone submits, without resistance, to the same structure of life and guidance for conduct that results from it. It is understandable that people, yielding to passion, might employ forcible methods in order to make opposing people do what they want. One can use force to drag a person to a place he does not want to go to. (Like animals, people always behave in this way when they are under the influence of passion.) And this one can understand, but the reasoning that says that violence can be a means of provoking people to behave in the way we want them to is incomprehensible.

All violence consists in some people forcing others, under threat of suffering or death, to do what they do not want to do. And therefore those who are coerced will only do that which they do not wish to do while they are weaker than the tyrants and cannot avoid doing it from fear of the threats for not fulfilling what is demanded. As soon as they grow stronger they naturally not only cease to do what they do not want to do, but, embittered by the struggle against their oppressors and everything they have had to suffer from them, they first free themselves from the tyrants, and then, in their turn, force their opponents to do what they regard as good and necessary. It would therefore seem evident that the struggle between oppressors and oppressed cannot unite people

but, on the contrary, the further it progresses the further it divides them. It would seem so obvious it would hardly be worth mentioning if it were not for the fact that the age-old lie that violence exerted by some over others can be useful to men and unite them had not been so popularized and accepted mutely as the most unquestionable truth, not just by those for whom violence is profitable, but by the majority of those very people who have suffered and who still suffer the most from it. This deceit has been in existence since long before Christianity, and has persisted until today in full strength throughout the Christian world.

The difference between what existed in ancient times, before the emergence of Christianity, and what goes on in today's Christian world is only that in ancient times the fact that there is no basis to the claim that violence, employed by some over others, can be useful and unifying, was completely concealed from the people; whereas today, the truth Christ expressed so clearly that violence exercised by some over others cannot unite and can only separate people has become more and more apparent. And as soon as people realize that the violence of some over others, apart from being the cause of their suffering, is irrational, those who used to bear their oppression quietly, immediately become provoked and embittered by it.

This very thing is going on right now among inhabitants of all the oppressed nations.

But it is not only the oppressed who are becoming increasingly aware of this truth; the oppressors are also becoming aware of it. Today, not even the most powerful men are convinced that they are behaving well and justly by exerting violence over others. This delusion is being destroyed for both rulers and their opponents. Both parties, although influenced by their position, try through every kind of argument to convince themselves that violence is useful and necessary, while knowing in he depth of their hearts that their acts of cruelty only achieve a semblance of what they want – and that only a temporary one which, in reality, distances them from their aims rather than drawing them closer.

And so, this awareness is becoming ever clearer to the members of the Christian world, and is inevitably leading them to the only conclusion that can help them out of their present miserable position. The way out consists in one thing: in mankind accepting the true meaning of Christ's teaching, which has been concealed from them and which is still unknown to the majority of people, together with the guidance for conduct that flows from it and which excludes violence.

# CHAPTER 4

> ‘When among one hundred men, one rules over ninety-nine, it is unjust, it is a despotism; when ten rule over ninety, it is equally unjust, it is an oligarchy; but when fifty-one rule over forty-nine (and this is only theoretical, for in reality it is always ten or eleven of these fifty-one), it is entirely just, it is freedom!
>
> Could there be anything funnier, in its manifest absurdity, than such reasoning? And yet it is this very reasoning that serves as the basis for all reformers of the political structure.’
>
> ‘The nations of the earth are trembling and shaking. Everywhere one feels some kind of active force that seems to be preparing for an earthquake. Never before has man held so great a responsibility. At each moment he undertakes more and more important tasks. There is a feeling that something great is about to happen. Before Christ’s appearance the world was awaiting a great event, but nevertheless failed to accept Him when He arrived. Likewise nowadays the world might experience the birth pangs before His second coming and fail to understand what is happening.’ (Lucie Mallory[79])
>
> ‘And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.’ (Matt.,X, 28)

Today the States of the Christian world have not only reached but have surpassed the limit which the States of the ancient world attained before their downfall. This can be seen particularly clearly because in our times every step forward in technical progress not only fails to advance the common weal but, on the contrary, shows with increasing clarity that all this progress can only increase people’s misery and can in no way diminish it. Yet other new contrivances might be invented for transporting people from one place to another, submarine, subterranean, aerial and spatial, as well as new methods of disseminating speech and

thought; but, since the people travelling from one place to another are neither willing nor able to commit anything but evil, the thoughts and words being spread will incite men to nothing but evil. As for the increasingly perfected means of exterminating one another, means which increase the possibility of slaughter without putting the user at risk, they only point more clearly to the impossibility of the Christian nations continuing their activities in the present direction.

Life among the Christian nations is now dreadful, particularly on account of the absence of any kind of unifying moral principle, and the irrationality which, despite all the intellectual advances, degrades them to a moral plane beneath the animals; and, more especially, on account of the complexity of the established lie which hides people from the misery and cruelty of their lives.

The lie supports the cruelty in life, the cruelty demands more and more lies and, like snowballs, they both grow without restraint. But there is an end to everything. And I believe that the end to this calamitous situation of the nations of the Christian world has now come.

The position of the people of Christendom is dreadful, but at the same time it is something that had to happen and could not but have happened, and which must inevitably lead these nations to salvation. The sufferings experienced by the people of the Christian world result from the lack of a religious outlook pertinent to our times and are the inevitable conditions of growth which must lead

to people adopting a religious attitude that does correspond to the age.

The world outlook relevant to our times is the understanding of the meaning of life and resulting guidance for conduct that was revealed in its true meaning in the Christian doctrines nineteen hundred years ago, but which has been concealed from men by the artificial and false distortions made by the Church.

# CHAPTER 5

> ‘From the moment when the first members of the Church Councils said: “We believe in the Holy Spirit”, that is to say, placed external authority above internal, and considered the pitiful deliberations of Councils to be more important and holier than that which is truly sacred to man: his reason and conscience – from that moment commenced the lie which lulls man’s body and soul, and which has murdered millions of human beings and continues its dreadful deeds to this day.’
>
> ‘In 1682 in England, Doctor Laytian, an honourable gentleman who wrote a book against the Episcopate, was judged and sentenced to the following punishment. He was cruelly flogged, his ear was then sliced off, one half of his nose split and then the initials for Disseminator of Trouble were branded on his cheek with a hot iron. Seven days later he was flogged again, although the scars had not yet healed, the other side of his nose was split, the other ear sliced off, and the other half of his cheek branded. All this was done in the name of Christianity.’ (John Morrison Davidson[80])
>
> ‘Christ founded neither a Church, nor a State; he handed over no laws, nor government, nor any form of external authority; but he tried to write the law of God in the hearts of men in order that they might govern themselves.’ (Hubert Newton[81])

The peculiarity of the position of today’s Christian nations is that they have founded their life on a teaching which in its true meaning destroys that life; and this hitherto concealed meaning is beginning to come to light. The Christian nations built their house not on sand but on ice. And the ice has begun to melt, has already melted, and the house will collapse.

While the majority of people, deceived by the doctrines of the Church, had only a vague understanding of the true meaning of Christ’s teaching, and instead of worshipping their former idols

worshipped Christ-God, His Mother, the Saints, bowed to relics and icons, believed in miracles, the sacraments, the Redemption and the infallibility of the Church hierarchy, the pagan structure of the world could be maintained and could satisfy people. All men alike believed in the explanation of the meaning of life which the Church gave them, and in the guidance for conduct that followed from it, and this faith drew people together. This is how it was until people noticed what was hiding behind the Church faith which had been given to them as the truth. But the misfortune of the Church faith was the existence of the Scriptures, which even the Church recognized as sacred. Despite the efforts made by the Church to conceal from people the essence of the teaching revealed in the Gospels, neither the prohibition of their translation into languages more accessible to the people, nor the false interpretation of them, could extinguish the light filtering through the deceit of the Church and illuminating men's souls as they grasped the enormous truth of the teaching with ever-increasing clarity.

With the spread of literacy and the printing press people began to discover the scriptures and to understand what was written in them, and could no longer, despite all the manoeuvres of the Church, avoid seeing the contradiction staring them in the eye between the political structure supported by the Church and the Gospel teachings. The Gospels directly denied the authority of both Church and State.

And this contradiction became more and more evident until people ceased to believe in the Church religion, and continued, only out of habit, propriety, and partly fear of the authorities, to hold on to the external forms of the Church religion: Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant alike, while no longer recognizing the inner religious significance.

This is what has happened to the overwhelming majority of the working people. (I am not speaking of the small communities of people who have openly rejected the Church teaching and established their own one, more or less approximating to the true meaning of the Christian teaching, because their numbers are so insignificant in comparison with the vast masses of the people who are increasingly liberating themselves from any kind of religious consciousness.)

The same thing has happened with the non-labouring, educated people of the Christian world. Even more lucidly than the simple folk these people perceived the complete bankruptcy and the inner contradictions of the Church teaching and quite naturally rejected it. But at the same time they were unable to recognize the true teaching of Christ, since it goes against the whole existing order, and more importantly against their exclusively privileged position in it.

Thus it is that in the Christian world of today some people – the vast majority – life, outwardly fulfilling the Church rites through habit, a sense of decorum, convenience, fear of the authorities, or

other self-interested aims, but without believing in the teaching of the Church, for having already perceived the inner contradiction they cannot. Others, who constitute a continually increasing section of the population, no longer accept the existing religion and, under the influence of a teaching they call ‘science’, consider any religion to be a vestige of superstition; they are guided in life by nothing other than their personal instincts.

To people who embraced a religious teaching that was superior to their capacities (such as the Christian teaching was to the pagans who adopted it at a time when social life, in the form of a coercive political regime, was already deeply embedded in the current morality and customs), what happened, which at first seems contradictory, was inevitable. Namely, as a result of having accepted the most advanced religion of their times, they found themselves devoid of any religion, and their moral and spiritual state sank lower than that of those who professed much inferior, and very much cruder, religious beliefs.

# CHAPTER 6

'The Church's perversion of Christianity has distanced us from the realization of the Kingdom of God; but, Christian truth, like fire on dry wood, has consumed its outer layer and burst forth. Everyone can see the significance of Christianity, and its influence is already stronger than the deceit which conceals it.'

'I can see a new religion, based on trust in man, appealing to untouched depths within us, believing that we can love good without any recompense, and that the divine principle exists in man.' (Solter[82])

'What we need, what the people need and the age demands, in order to find a way out of the murk of egoism, doubt and negation in which it is immersed, is a faith in which our souls can cease to wander in pursuit of personal ends and can move forwards in unison, recognizing one source, one law, one end. Any strong belief that springs up from the ruins of the old, worn-out religions will modify the existing order, since all strong beliefs invariably accompany any offshoot of human activity.

In different formulas and different degrees, mankind repeats the words of the Lord's prayer: "Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven".' (Mazzini[83])

'It is impossible to weigh or measure the evil that results from false belief. Religion is the establishment of a relationship between man and God and the universe, and the definition of man's purpose that results from it. What would man's life be like if this relationship and resulting definition were false?'

'It is not sufficient to discard the false faith, that is the false relationship to the universe. It is still necessary to establish a new one.'

The tragedy of the situation of the people of the Christian world consists in the fact that, owing to an unavoidable misunderstanding, the Christian nations adopted as their own a religious teaching which in its true meaning most clearly negated and destroyed the whole social structure of life by which they were living and without which they could not imagine life.

In this lies both the tragedy of the situation and the great, exclusive blessing of the Christian nations.

In the distorted manner in which the Christian teaching was presented to the pagan peoples it appeared to them simply as a slight modification of their crude conceptions of divinity, presenting a much higher conception of man's purpose and the moral demands made of him. However, the real significance of the teaching was concealed from them by complex dogmas and attractive, hypnotic rituals to such an extent that they did not even suspect it. And yet, the true significance of this teaching was not only clearly expressed in the Gospel texts, accepted by the Church as divine revelations and inseparably connected with the Church's distorted teaching; but this meaning was so natural and akin to the spirit of mankind that despite being buried under false and distorted dogmas, those who were more sensitive to the truth began, with increasing frequency, to adopt the teaching in its true meaning and to perceive, with ever greater clarity, the contradictions between the existing order of the world and the true Christian teachings.

This contradiction was recognized in the Middle Ages, and even in ancient times, by the Fathers of the Church: Tatian,[84] Clement,[85] Origen,[86] Tertullian,[87] Cyprian,[88] Lactancius [89] and others. In modern times it has become still clearer and has been expressed in the large number of sects who rejected political structures that contradicted Christianity with their invariable accompaniment of

violence, as well as in all the various humanistic teachings that do not even call themselves Christian, for example: Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, – ideas that are spreading very rapidly at the moment and which are really nothing other than partial manifestations of Christian consciousness in its true sense, denying violence.

The fact that the world's Christian nations adopted, in a hidden, perverted form, a teaching which in its real meaning must inevitably destroy the order of life in which they live and from which they do not wish to part is the cause of the suffering of the peoples of Christendom. Their great blessing was that, having adopted Christianity in its distorted form, which nevertheless included a truth concealed from them, they are now brought to the inevitable necessity of accepting the Christian teaching in its true, rather than distorted, meaning; this true meaning has become increasingly clear to them and is now quite apparent, and it is this alone that can save people from the wretched situation in which they find themselves.

## CHAPTER 7

> ‘The main reason for our poor social structure is false belief.’
>
> ‘We must pay the greatest attention to our public affairs; we should be prepared to change our minds, to renounce our old views and adopt new ones. We should cast prejudices aside and argue with a completely open mind. A sailor who raises the same sail regardless of changes in the direction of the wind will never reach his port.’ (Henry George[90])
>
> ‘We should understand Christ’s teaching, openly and simply, and the horrible deceit in which each and every one of us lives will become clear.’

It is becoming more and more evident in our age that the true significance of the Christian doctrine is that the essence of human life is the evergrowing manifestation of the source of everything, indicated in us through love; and, therefore, that the essence of human life and the highest law governing it is love.

The fact that love is a necessary and happy aspect of human life was recognized by all the ancient religious beliefs. In all the teachings of the Egyptian sages, the Brahmins, the Stoics, the Buddhists, Taoists and others, amicability, pity, mercy, charity and love in general are considered the chief virtues. In the most superior of these teachings this recognition reached the point where love towards every living thing was advocated, and even recompense of good for evil, as is taught by the Taoist and Buddhist religions in particular. But not one of these doctrines made this virtue the basis of life, a supreme law that should be not only the chief, but the only, guiding principle in people’s conduct, as did the most recent religion: Christianity. In all the pre-Christian

doctrines love was regarded as one of the virtues, but not as that which the Christian teaching acknowledges it to be: metaphysically the origin of everything, practically the highest law of human life, i.e. that which under no circumstances admits of exception. Compared to all the ancient teachings Christianity is neither new nor different; it is simply a more clear and precise expression of the basis of human life that was felt and vaguely expounded by previous religions. In this respect the peculiarity of the Christian teaching lies only in the fact that, being the last, it uses greater precision and clarity to express the essence of the law of love and the guidance for conduct that must follow from it. And thus the Christian teaching on love is not, as in former doctrines, merely a teaching about a certain virtue, but it is a definition of the supreme law of human life and the guidance for conduct that inevitably follows from it. Christ's teaching clarifies why this is the highest law in life, and at the same time it indicates a series of actions which men must either commit or not commit as a consequence of accepting this teaching as the truth. The Christian dogma states very clearly that since it is the supreme law its fulfilment cannot admit any exceptions, as former teachings did, and that the love which defines these laws is only love when it admits no exceptions and when it is applied equally to foreigners, to all sectarians, and likewise to the enemies who hate us and wrong us.

The step forward achieved by the Christian teaching, as well as its most important significance and virtue, lay in the explanation

of why this law is the supreme law of human life, and the precise definition of the actions which must follow from it.

The explanation of why this law is the supreme law of life is expressed with particular clarity in the Epistle of St John: 'Beloved let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God… No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us… God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.' (I John, IV, 7,8,12,16) and: 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death' (I John, III, 14).

The teaching amounts to saying that what we call 'our self', or our life, is really the divine principle, limited in us by our body, and manifesting itself as love, and that therefore the true life of each man, divine and free, expresses itself as love.

The guidance for conduct that follows from this understanding of the law of love that admits no exceptions is expressed in many parts of the Gospels, and with particular clarity and precision in the fourth commandment of the Sermon on the Mount: 'You have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth [Ex., XXI, 24]. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil' is said in verse 38 of the fifth chapter of St Matthew's gospel. In verses 39 and 40, as if forseeing those exceptions which might appear necessary when the law of love is applied to life, it is clearly and

definitively stated that there are, and can be, no circumstances when it is permissible to deviate from the very simple and vital requirement of love: not to do to others that which you would not have them do to you: '… but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.'

In other words, violence performed against you can never justify violence on your part. This inadmissibility of justifying transgressions of the law of love on account of behaviour from others is expressed even more clearly and exactly in the last commandment of the Sermon on the Mount, which makes a straightforward reference to the usual false argument used to justify breaking the law: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy' (Leviticus, XIX, 17–18), 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the food, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans do the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans do so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matt., v, 43–8)

It is this recognition of the law of love as the highest law of human life, and the clearly expressed guidance for conduct that follows from the Christian teaching on love, applied equally to enemies and those who hate, offend and curse us, that constitutes the peculiarity of Christ's teaching. The precise and definite meaning given to the doctrine of love and the guidance resulting from it inevitably involves a complete transformation of the established structure of life, not only among Christian nations, but among all the nations of the world.

In this lies the principal difference between the former teachings and the chief significance of the Christian teaching in its true meaning; and it is this that comprises the step forward in human consciousness achieved by the Christian doctrine. This step is based on the fact that all the former religious and moral teachings on love, while compelled to admit the virtue of love in human life, yet allowed the possibility of certain situations whereby the fulfilment of the law of love ceased to be obligatory and could be suspended. And as soon as the law of love ceased to be the highest, immutable law of human life, all it's beneficence disappeared, and the teaching of love was reduced to eloquent homilies and words which were non-obligatory and left the whole way of the life of the nations as it was before the doctrine of love appeared: that is based on violence alone. But the Christian teaching in its true meaning, recognizing the law of love as supreme, and permitting no exceptions in its application to life, ruled out any form of

violence and consequently could not but condemn the whole structure of the world founded on violence.

And this chief significance of the teaching was hidden from people by false Christianity, which acknowledged the law of love not as the supreme law of human life, but in the manner of the pre-Christian teachings – as just one of the rules of conduct which it is useful to observe when there is nothing to prevent one from doing so.

## CHAPTER 8

'The wretchedness of war and military preparation not only fail to comply with the reasons presented in their justification, but for the most part these reasons are so insignificant that they are unworthy of consideration and are quite unknown to those who die in war.'

'Men are so accustomed to maintaining the external order of life by violence that they cannot conceive of life being possible without violence.

Moreover, if men employ violence to establish an externally just life, then the people who establish this sort of life must know what justice is and be just themselves. If some people can know what justice is and are able to be just, why cannot everyone know it and be just?'

'If people were completely virtuous they would never digress from the truth.

The truth is only dangerous to those who commit evil. Those who do good love the truth.'

'Reason is often the slave of sin; it strives to justify it.'

'One is sometimes astonished to see someone else defending very strange, irrational propositions, whether they are religious, political or scientific. Look further and you will discover that he is defending his own position.'

The true meaning of Christ's teaching consists in the recognition of love as the *supreme law* of life, and therefore not admitting any exceptions.

Christianity (i.e. the law of love not admitting any exceptions) that does permit the use of violence in the name of other laws, presents an inner contradiction resembling cold fire or hot ice.

It would seem evident that if some people, despite recognizing the virtue of love, can admit the necessity of tormenting or murdering certain people for the sake of some future good, then

others, by just the same right and also acknowledging the virtue of love, can claim the same necessity in the name of some future good. Thus it might appear obvious that the admission of any kind of exception to the requirements of fulfilling the law of love diminishes the whole significance, meaning and virtue of this law which lies at the basis of all religious doctrines and teachings on morality. It seems so obvious that one might be ashamed at being asked to prove it; nevertheless the people of Christendom, both believers and non-believers who still acknowledge the moral code, regard the teaching on love that opposes all violence (especially the doctrine of non-resistance to evil that follows from the law of love) as something fantastic, impossible and totally inapplicable to life.

One can see why those in power say that without employing violence there can be no order, or decent life, meaning by the word ‘order’, that structure of life wherein the minority can indulge in excess through the labour of others, and by ‘decent life’, the lack of any impediment to leading such a life. However unjust what they say is, one can see that they are able to speak thus because the suppression of violence would not only deprive them of the possibility of living in the way they do, but would expose all the age-old injustice and cruelty of their life.

One might think the working populace do not need the violence which, surprising as it may seem, they employ so systematically against one another, and from which they suffer so badly. For the

violence the rulers do to the oppressed is not the direct, spontaneous violence of the strong over the weak, or the majority over the minority, one hundred over twenty, etc. The violence of the rulers is upheld in the only way the violence of the minority over the majority can be: by the fraud which cunning, quick-witted people established long ago, as a consequence of which people, for the sake of small but instant gain, deprive themselves not only of greater profits but of freedom, and expose themselves to the most cruel sufferings. The essence of this fraud was stated as far back as four centuries ago by the French writer La Boëtie[91] in his article 'Voluntary Slavery'. This is what he says about it:

'It is not weapons, not armed men – cavalry and infantry – that defend tyrants, but, however hard to believe, three or four men uphold a tyrant and keep the whole country in servitude to him. The circle of people closest to the tyrant has always consisted of five or six men. These men have either wormed their way into his favour, or been chosen by him. In order to be the accomplices of his cruelty, the companions of his pleasure, and to share in his robberies. These six have six hundred in their power who behave towards the six as the six behave towards the tyrant. The six hundred have six thousand beneath them, whom they have elevated to the position and appointed to govern the provinces and handle financial affairs on the condition they serve their avarice and cruelty. And these are followed by a still larger retinue. And anyone who wishes to get to the heart of the matter will see that there are not just six thousand, but hundreds of

thousands, even millions, chained to the tyrant by these links. Thanks to this there is an increase in the number of public functionaries, and this supports the tyranny. And all those who are engaged in this service also profit by it themselves, and by these profits are bound to the tyrant; and the number of people for whom tyranny is advantageous is so plentiful that they approach in number those who would welcome freedom. As the doctor says, if there is something poisonous in our bothes all the bad juices will pour into the unhealthy spot, and it is just the same with governance: as soon as a tyrant is created he gathers all the rotten dregs of the State around him – all the gangs of thieves and good-for-nothings who are unequipped to do anything but are simply self-interested and grasping, assemble in order to participate in the booty, and to become petty tyrants under the chief one.

Thus the tyrant enslaves some of his people through others who, if they were not good-for-nothings, he would fear. But, as they say, 'in order to chop wood, they take wedges of the same wood'. Similarly, his retainers must be of the same type as those from whom they protect him.

They sometimes suffer at his hands, but these God-forsaken, lost souls are prepared to endure all evil so long as they are in a position to inflict it in their turn – not on those who inflict it on them, but on those who cannot do anything except endure it.'

This lie is now so firmly rooted in the nation that those very people who only suffer from the use of violence justify it and even

demand it as if it were something essential to them, and they inflict it on one another. The result of this habit of deception, now become second nature, is the astonishing human delusion whereby the people who suffer the most from the deception are the ones who support it.

One would think it would be the working people, receiving no advantage from the violence exercised over them, who would eventually see through the deceit in which they are entangled and, having once done so, free themselves in the most simple and easy way: by ceasing to participate in the violence which can only be done to them by virtue of their participating in it.

It would seem so simple and natural for the working people, particularly the agricultural workers, who in Russia, as in the rest of the world, form a majority, to finally understand that they have for centuries been suffering from something they have brought upon themselves to no advantage; that the chief cause of their sufferings is that the land is owned by people who do not work on it, and this is upheld by they themselves acting as watchmen, village constables and soldiers; and that all the taxes demanded of them, both directly and indirectly, are collected by them themselves, as village elders, tax-collectors and, again, as policemen and soldiers. It would seem such a simple thing for the working people to realize this and to finally say to those they regard as their leaders: ‘Leave us in peace! If you, emperors, presidents, generals, judges, bishops, professors and other learned

men need armies, navies, universities, ballets, synods, conservatoires, prisons, gallows and guillotines, do it all yourselves: collect your own taxes, judge, execute and imprison among yourselves, murder people in war, but do it all yourselves and leave us in peace because we need none of it, and we no longer wish to participate in all these useless, and above all evil deeds!'

What could be more natural than this? And yet, the working people, more especially the agricultural workers for whom none of it is necessary, do not do so, either in Russia or in any other country in the world. Some of them, the majority, continue to torment themselves, fulfilling government demands that run counter to their own needs by becoming policemen, tax collectors or soldiers; while the others, the minority, trying to escape violence, inflict it, at any given revolutionary opportunity, on those from whose violence they suffer; in other words, they stifle fire with fire, and only achieve an increase in the violence used against themselves.

Why do people act so irrationally?

Because, as a result of the perpetuated deception, they can no longer see the connection between their oppression and their participation in violence.

Why do they not see the connection?

For the same reason that accounts for all human misery: because they lack faith and without faith people can only be guided by self-

interest, and men guided only by self-interest cannot do otherwise than deceive or be deceived.

And this leads to the apparently surprising phenomenon that, despite all the evident advantages of violence, despite the fact that the deceit in which the working classes are entangled has become so evident today, despite the manifest exposure of the injustices from which they suffer, despite all the rebellions aimed at suppressing violence, the working people, the vast majority of the population, not only submit themselves to violence but continue to support it and, contrary to common sense and their own interests, commit acts of violence against each other.

Some of the working people, the vast majority, continue out of habit to cling to the old, false Christian teaching of the Church while no longer believing in it but only in the doctrine of ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’, and the political structure based on it. The other section, the factory workers who have been touched by civilization (especially in Europe) deny all religion and yet in the depths of their souls they unconsciously believe in the ancient law of ‘an eye for an eye’, and following this they submit, although hating it, to the existing regime when they can see no alternative. When they see an alternative they attempt to suppress violence through the most diverse violent means.

The first, the great majority of the uncivilized workers, cannot alter their position, because professing belief in the political structure they cannot refrain from participating in violence; the

civilized working people, who have no faith and who follow nothing but various political doctrines, cannot free themselves from violence because they try to suppress it with violence.

# CHAPTER 9

'The savage instinct of military murder has been so carefully cultivated and encouraged over the course of a thousand years that it has dug deep roots in the human brain. One must hope, however, that a humanity better than ours will manage to free itself from this dreadful crime. But what will this superior humanity think of the so-called refined civilization which we are so proud of? Almost the same as we think of the tribes of ancient Mexico with their cannibalism, who are at once war-like, pious, and bestial.' (Letourneau[92])

'War will only be annihilated when people cease to have any share in violence, and are prepared to suffer all the persecutions they will bring upon themselves for doing so. This is the only way to annihilate war.' (Anatole France[93])

'Ask the majority of Christians what they consider the greatest evil from which Christ freed humanity and they will say: from Hell, from eternal fire, from punishment in the next world. As a corollary to this they think that salvation is something that someone else can achieve for us. The word hell, which is seldom met in the Holy Scriptures, has done much harm to Christianity as a result of false interpretations. People run away from external hell which they are made to fear most of all. The salvation that man needs most and that which gives him freedom is redemption from the evil within his soul. There is something far worse than external punishment. It is the sin of the soul being in rebellion against God; the soul, endowed with God's strength, yielding itself to the force of bestial instinct; the soul which exists before God, yet fears the threats and fury of men, preferring human glory to its own peaceful awareness of virtue. There is no fate worse than this. And it is this that the unrepentant person carries with him to the grave. And it is this we ought to fear.

To gain salvation, in the highest meaning of the word, means to raise the fallen spirit, cure the sick soul, give it back its freedom of thought, conscience and love. In this lies the salvation for which Christ died. It is for this salvation that we have been given the Holy Spirit, and it is towards this salvation that the Christian teaching is directed.' (Channing [94])

‘It seems so easy to tell the truth, yet it takes a great deal of inner strength to do so.

The level of a person’s honesty is an indication of the level of his moral perfection.’

This is how it has been for a long time among the non-Christian and the Christian world alike, and continues even today. But I believe that now, at precisely this moment, after the pitiful, senseless Russian uprising, and more especially after the extremely impertinent and senseless cruelty of the manner in which it was suppressed, I believe the less civilized Russians, i.e. for the most part the agricultural workers, who are less intellectually corrupt and still adhere to a vague concept of the idea of a Christian faith, will finally understand where the means of salvation lie and be the first to make use of it.

A military tribunal is being held in a provincial town. There is a table and on the table a mirror with a two-headed eagle over it and an inscription stamped beneath; there are also legal texts and neatly arranged sheets of paper with printed headings. At the table, in the seat of honour, sits a rotund man in military uniform with galloons and a cross around his neck; he has an intelligent face, expressing good nature, and is looking expecially kindly at the moment having just had lunch and received reassuring news of his child’s health. Next to him is another officer, of German origin, displeased with his appointment and reflecting on the report he will give to the chief. In the third seat is an extremely young officer, a dandy, a convivial-looking fellow who, while lunching at

the colonel's table, cracked a witty joke that amused everyone. He is recalling the joke and smiling, almost noticeably. He is longing to smoke and waiting impatiently for the interval. At a separate table sits the secretary. Before him is a pile of papers in which he is totally absorbed so as to be ready to hand over the required paper as soon as the chief demands it.

Two young men, one a peasant from the Province of Penza, the other a petty bourgeois from the town of Lubin, both dressed as soldiers, bring in a third man, very young and also dressed in a soldier's greatcoat. This young man is pale. He glances around once at his tribunal and then fixes his gaze ahead. He has already spent three years in prison for refusing to take the oath and perform military service. In order to be rid of him after these three years he has been offered the chance to take the oath and then be released on the grounds that like a soldier he has spent three years in service, albeit in prison. But the young man has stated in church the same as he said before the assembly: that as a Christian he can neither take the oath, nor be a murderer. On this occasion he is being tried again for his new refusal. The secretary reads the document called the indictment. It states that the young man has refused to receive his pay and that he considers military service sinful. The good-natured chairman asks: 'Do you plead guilty!' 'I have done and said all that is stated here but I do not consider myself guilty,' the young man answers in a faltering, trembling voice.

The chairman nods his head as an indication that the reply is in order; he then glances at the document and asks: ‘How do you explain your refusal?’

‘I have refused, and still do because I consider military service sinful,’ he falters. ‘It is against Christ’s teaching.’

The chairman is satisfied by this and nods his head approvingly. Everything is in order.

‘Have you anything further to add to your statement?’

With a trembling lower lip the young man talks of how it is written in the Gospels that it is forbidden not only to kill but to hold bad feelings towards one’s fellow men.

The chairman approves of this too. The German frowns disapprovingly, and the young officer listens, with his head and eyebrows raised, as if hearing something new and interesting.

The accused, becoming more and more flustered, states that the oath is straightforwardly forbidden and that he would consider himself guilty unless he refused, and that he is now ready…

The chairman stops him, considering that the accused is speaking unnecessarily and failing to keep to the point.

After this the witnesses are summoned: the colonel of the regiment and a sergeant-major. The colonel of the regiment is the chairman’s usual bridge partner and a great devotee and master of the game. The sergeant-major is an agile, good-looking, obliging Pole of noble birth, and a passionate reader of novels. A priest enters too, an elderly man who has just taken leave of his

daughter, his son-in-law and his grandchildren, who have been staying with him; he is feeling upset after a quarrel with his wife on account of his having given their daughter a carpet which his wife did not wish to give away.

'Would you be so kind, Father, as to swear the witnesses in, and to remind them of the sinfulness of giving false witness before God,' asks the chairman, addressing the priest.

The priest puts on a stole, picks up a crucifix and a bible, and gives the usual words of admonition. Then the colonel takes the oath. He swiftly raises two clean fingers (fingers that are very well known to the chairman, who follows them in card games), and repeats the words of the oath after the priest, then he kisses the crucifix and the bible with a smack of the lips, as if he were enjoying himself. After the colonel, the Catholic priest enters and swears in the sergeant-major with equal rapidity.

The court waits calmly and seriously. The young officer, who has just been out for a quick smoke, arrives back in time for the testimony of the witnesses.

The witnesses testify to what has been said by the accused. The chairman expresses approval. Then the officer who has been sitting apart stands up: he is the prosecutor. He walks up to the desk, shuffles around the papers lying on it and begins speaking loudly, recounting everything the young man has done, which the whole court already knows, and which the young man has just expounded himself without any attempt to conceal the reason for which he is

accused, but, on the contrary, increasing the grounds for conviction. The prosecutor declares that the accused, as he himself admits, does not belong to any religious sect, that his parents are Orthodox believers and, therefore, his refusal to fulfil his military service has no grounds other than obstinacy. He declares that this obstinacy of the accused and of other mistaken, recalcitrant people like him has forced the government to the decision of taking severe punitive measures against such types, and that these measures should, in his opinion, be used in this instance. Then follow a few unnecessary words from the defence. They all go out. Then the accused is led in again, followed by the court. The judges sit down and immediately stand up again and the chairman, without looking at the accused, reads the decision of the court in a quiet, even voice: the accused, a man who has already served three years for not letting himself be called a soldier, is firstly deprived of his military title and of various rights and privileges, and secondly, sentenced to four years imprisonment in a penal battalion.

After this the young man is led out under escort and all the participants resume their usual occupations and entertainments, as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

Only the young man, the keen smoker, feels some peculiar, disturbing sensation which he cannot get rid of, while he is haunted by the memory of the strong, noble, indisputable words the condemned man expressed with such emotion. During the adjournment this young man had wanted to disagree with the

decision of his elders, but stopped short, swallowed his words, and agreed.

In the evening at the colonel's home, during the interval between rubbers, everyone gathered around the tea table and the conversation turned to the recalcitrant soldier. The commander expressed his clear opinion that the reason for it all was lack of education: 'They snatch hold of all kinds of ideas but they do not know what to do with them and it leads to all this nonsense.'

'No, Uncle, I do not agree with you,' a female student, a social democrat and a niece of the colonel, broke in. 'One should respect the energy and staunchness of the man. One must only regret that this strength is falsely directed,' she added, thinking about how useful these stoical people would be if only they defended the scientific truths of socialism, rather than outdated religious fantasies.

'Come now, you're a confirmed revolutionary,' said her uncle, smiling.

'And it seems to me,' said the young officer who never stopped smoking, 'that from the Christian point of view there is nothing to contradict him!'

'I don't know about points of view,' said an old general sternly, 'I only know that a soldier must be a soldier and not a preacher.'

'In my opinion the most important matter of all,' said the chairman of the tribunal, his eyes sparkling, 'is that if we want to play six rubbers, we mustn't waste precious time.'

‘If anyone wants more tea, I will serve it at the card table’, said the hospitable host, and one of the players, with an adept and practised gesture, spread his cards like a fan. And the players took their seats.

At the entrance to the prison, where the escort with the recalcitrant prisoner awaited the instructions from the officials, a conversation ensued.

‘How come the priests don’t know?’ said one of the escorts. ‘If it isn’t in the books, that’s maybe why.’

‘It must be that they don’t understand,’ answered the prisoner. ‘If they understood they would say the same thing. Christ did not instruct us to kill, but to love.’

‘That must be so. But it’s a strange thing and a hard thing moreover.’

‘There’s nothing hard in it. Here I am locked away, and about to be shut up again, yet my soul feels so good I wish everyone felt the same.’

A middle-aged administrative officer approached. ‘Well, Semeonovitch,’ he addressed the prisoner with respect, ‘sentenced?’

‘Yes, I’m sentenced.’

The officer shook his head, ‘Well, there it is, but it’s hard to put up with.’

‘But one must do it,’ answered the prisoner, smiling and visibly touched by the sympathy.

‘That’s the way it is. Our Lord endured and He asked us to, but it’s hard.’

As he spoke these words, the handsome Polish sergeant-major entered with quick, dashing steps.

‘Stop all the chattering, march to the new prison!’

The sergeant-major was particularly fierce because he had been ordered to make sure that the prisoner did not talk to the soldiers. During the last two years he had been in prison he had perverted four men with whom he had come into contact; they had similarly refused to take the oath, been tried and were now serving sentences in various prisons.

# CHAPTER 10

'The Christian revelation was the doctrine stating the equality of men, that God is the Father and that all men are brothers. It struck to the core of the monstrous tyranny which inspired the civilized world; it smashed the slaves' chains and annihilated the enormous injustice whereby a small group of people could live in luxury at the expense of the masses, and ill-treat the so-called working classes. This is why the first Christians were persecuted and why, once it became clear that they could not be suppressed, the privileged classes adopted it and perverted it. It ceased to be the celebration of the true Christianity of the first centuries and to a significant extent became the tool of the privileged classes.' (Henry George[95])

'The Church's perversion of Christianity has distanced us from the realization of the Kingdom of God; but Christian truth, like fire on dry wood, has consumed its outer layer and burst forth. Everyone can see the significance of Christianity, and its influence is already stronger than the deceit which conceals it.

I can see a new religion based on trust in man, appealing to untouched depths within us, believing that we can love good without any recompense, and that the divine principle exists in man.' (Solter[96])

'Do not think that Church Christianity was an incomplete, one-sided, formal view of Christianity, but nevertheless Christianity. Do not think this: for Church Christianity is the enemy of true Christianity and stands in relation to true Christianity as a criminal caught in the act. It must either destroy itself, or continue to commit new crimes.'

What the recalcitrant soldier said at his trial has been said long ago, since the first appearance of Christianity. The most sincere and fervent Fathers of the Church said the very same thing about the incompatibility of Christianity with one of the fundamental and unavoidable conditions of the existing political structure: the army. For a Christian cannot be a soldier and cannot be prepared to murder anyone he is ordered to.

The Christian community of the first to the fifth centuries A.D. categorically declared, through its leaders, that Christianity forbids any murder, including murder in war.

In the second century the philosopher Tatian, a convert to Christianity, declared that killing in war was inadmissible for Christians, as was any kind of murder, and he regarded the honoured military wreath as an obscenity for a Christian. In the same century Athinagoras of Athens stated that not only must Christians themselves not kill, but they must not be present at any scene of murder.

In the third century Clement of Alexandria[97] contrasted the 'warrior-like pagans', with the 'peaceful race of Christians'. But it was the renowned Origen [98] who most clearly expressed the Christians' dislike of war. Applying to the Christians the words of Isaiah, who said that a time would come when people would beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, Origen says firmly: 'We will not raise arms against any other nation, we will not practise the art of war, because through Jesus Christ we have become the children of peace.' Replying to the accusation made by Celsus against the Christians who refused military service (for in the opinion of Celsus the Roman Empire would collapse if it became Christian), Origen says that Christians fight more than others for the sake of the Emperor, but they do it through good deeds, prayers, and by setting a good example to others. As for armed combat, Origen quite rightly says that a

Christian will not fight in the Emperor's armies, not even if the Emperor forced them to.

Tertullian,[99] a contemporary of Origen, expressed himself equally decisively on the impossibility of Christians becoming soldiers. He said of military service: 'It is not fitting to serve the emblem of Christ and the emblem of the devil, the fortress of light and the fortress of darkness. One soul cannot serve two masters. And how can one wage war without the sword which the Lord himself has taken away? How can it be possible to practise using the sword when the Lord has said that anyone who takes up his sword will perish by the sword? How can a son of peace participate in combat?'

The celebrated Cyprian[100] said: 'The world is going mad in mutual bloodshed. And murder, which is considered a crime when people commit it singly, is transformed into a virtue when they do it en masse. The offenders acquire impunity by increasing their ravaging.'

In the fourth century Lactancius[101] said the same thing: 'There must not be any exception to God's commandment that it is always a sin to kill a person. It is not permitted to bear arms, for our only weapon is the truth.'

In the rules of the third century Egyptian Church, and in the so-called 'Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ', it is absolutely forbidden for any Christian to enter military service, under pain of excommunication from the Church. In the lives of the Saints there

are a number of examples of Christian martyrs of the early centuries who suffered on account of their refusal to enter military service.

Thus Maximillian, having been brought to the office of military conscription, answered the Proconsul's first question as to what his name was, thus: 'My name is Christian and therefore I cannot fight.' Despite this statement he was enrolled as a soldier, but refused to serve. It was explained to him that he must choose between his duty to perform military duties and death. He said, 'I had better die, for I cannot fight.' He was handed over to the executioner.

Marcellus was a soldier in the Legion of Troy. Believing in the teaching of Christ and the fact that warfare is an anti-Christian activity, he took off his military decorations in front of the whole legion, threw them on the ground and explained that having become a Christian he could no longer serve. He was imprisoned, but while in prison he still said: 'A Christian cannot bear arms.' He was executed.

After Marcellus, Cessian, who belonged to the same regiment, refused to serve. He too was executed.

Under Julian the Apostate,[102] Martin, who had been brought up in a military environment, refused to continue his service. Under examination from the Emperor he simply said: 'I am a Christian and therefore I cannot fight.'

At the first Ecumenical Council in 325 it was clearly stated that there would be a severe penance for Christians who rejoined the army having left it. The original words of this resolution, in the translation recognized by the Orthodox Church, are as follows: 'Called by grace to the profession of faith and expressing their first fit of anger by removing their military girdles, they then go back, like dogs to their vomit… and these people must prostrate themselves before the Church for ten years, begging forgiveness as they listen to the reading of the Scriptures from the porch.'

Christians who remained in the army were instructed not to kill the enemy in time of war. Already in the fourth century Basil the Great recommended that soldiers guilty of breaking this decree be banned from communion for three years.

Thus, not only in the first three centuries at a time of Christian persecution, but even after Christianity had triumphed over paganism and was adopted as the prevailing State religion, the Christians still held the conviction that war is incompatible with Christianity. Ferrucius said this quite explicitly and decisively, and was executed for doing so: 'Christians are not allowed to shed blood, even in a just war, or at the order of Christian rulers.' In the fourth century Lucifer, Bishop of Celeris, taught that even the most precious blessing of the Christian – his faith – must be defended, 'not by killing others, but by one's own death'. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, who died in 431, threatened with eternal torment those who served Caesar with weapons in their hands.

This is how it was during the first four centuries of Christianity. Under Constantine[103] the cross had already appeared on the standard of the Roman Legions. In 416 a decree was issued forbidding pagans to join the army. All the soldiers became Christians: that is, all the Christians, with only a few exceptions, renounced Christ.

Over the course of the subsequent fifteen centuries, the simple, indubitable and evident truth, that the profession of Christianity is incompatible with readiness to commit any kind of violence, even murder, at the will of others, has been so concealed from people, and has so weakened the sincerity of the Christian religious sentiment, that for generation after generation people, nominally professing Christianity, have lived and died, permitting murders, participating in murders, committing them and profiting by them.

Thus the centuries went by. As if mocking Christianity the Crusades were embarked upon. The most dreadful crimes were performed in the name of Christianity and those few people who had clung on to the basic principles of Christianity and did not permit violence – the Manicheans,[104] Montanists, [105] Cathars[106] and others – only incited the majority of people to despise and persecute them.

But the truth, like a flame, slowly burns through the wrappings concealing it, and from the beginning of the last century it has become ever more apparent to people, and whether they like it or not it has caught their attention.

This truth has manifested itself in many places, but especially noticeably in Russia at the beginning of the last century. There were probably very many examples that have occurred, leaving no trace.

Only some of them are known to us.

## CHAPTER 11

‘For people living evil lives, every step in the direction of goodness invokes persecution rather than love.’

‘True bravery is in the personal struggle of he who knows that God is his ally.’

‘In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.’ (John, XVI, 33)

‘Do not await the fulfilment of the divine cause you serve; but know that none of your efforts are fruitless, for they all advance the cause.’

‘The most important and necessary human deeds, for both doer and recipient, are those of which he does not see the results.’

In the year 1818 a governor-in-chief of the Caucasus, Moraviev, noted in his diary that five serfs had been sent from the Tambov region to the Caucasus because when they were conscripted they refused to serve. They were flogged several times with a knout and chased down the gauntlet, but they would not give in and kept saying: ‘All men are equal, the Tsar is a man like the rest of us; we will not obey, we will not pay taxes and, above all, we will not kill our fellow men in war. You can tear us to pieces but we will not give in. We will not put on military greatcoats, we will not eat soldiers’ rations, we will not be soldiers. We will take alms, but we do not want any money from the government.’

Men of this kind were flogged to death, exterminated in prison, and everything about them was carefully hidden; but over the course of the last century their number has been steadily increasing.

Thus, ‘in 1827, two guardsmen, Nikolaev and Bogdanov, in order to avoid military service, fled to a small monastery of sectarians that had been established in the woods by a merchant called Sokolov. When they were caught they refused to serve in the army, saying that it was incompatible with their beliefs; they also refused to take the oath. The military authorities decided to punish them for this by making them run the gauntlet and then sending them to a penal battalion.’

‘In 1830 an unknown man and woman were arrested by the local police in Peshekovsk region in the province of Yaroslav. On examination the man explained that he was called Egor Ivanov and that he did not know where he came from, and that for sixty-three years of his life he had had no father other than Christ the Saviour. His wife made the same declaration.

‘During the priest’s admonition in the local court, the two added that other than the one Heavenly Sovereign there was no other, and that they did not acknowledge the Tsar, nor any other established civil or spiritual authority. When he was interrogated in the court of law Egor Ivanov repeated that he was seventy years old, that he did not acknowledge civil and spiritual authorities and that he considered them transgressors of the commandments of the Christian religion. Egor Ivanov was banished to the Solovetski monastery to be put to work, but for some reason he was kept in jail, where he remained until his death in 1839. He died firm in his delusions.’

‘In 1835 an unknown person, calling himself simply Ivan, was arrested in the Province of Yaroslav. He declared that he did not recognize the saints, the Tsar, or any authority. He was sent to Solovetski monastery to be employed as a workman in the summer months. In the same year he was sent to the army by Imperial order.’

‘In the year 1849 a peasant recruit from the region of Moscow, Ivan Shroupov, aged nineteen, refused to take the oath despite every sort of coercion. The motive behind his refusal was that, in the words of God, he must serve only one God, and he therefore did not wish to serve the Tsar, nor to take the oath of allegiance, for fear of being a perjuror. The authorities, reasoning that if Shroupov was tried and the case became known it would cause damage, decided to confine him in a monastery. The Emperor Nikolai Pavlovitch inscribed the following resolution on Shroupov’s report: “Remove the above-mentioned recruit, under guard, to the Solovetski monastery.”’

These are some of the reports that went into print concerning individual cases – about one thousandth of those Russians who realized the impossibility of reconciling the profession of Christianity and obedience to the political authorities. In the last century there were entire communities, with many thousands of members, who recognized the incompatibility of Christ’s teaching and the existing order, and a great many still exist today: the Molokans,[107] Jehovists, Klisti,[108] Skoptsi,[109] Old Believers[110] and

many others, all of whom for the most part conceal their non-recognition of political authority, but regard it as the product of the source of evil: the devil. In the last century the Doukabars,[111] numbering tens of thousands, were particularly noteworthy and powerful in their straightforward denial of political authority. Despite all the persecutions, several thousands stuck to the truth and emigrated to America. The number of people who have realized the incompatibility of Christianity and obedience to the government has continually increased; in our time, and especially since the government created the most blatant contradiction to Christ's teaching by demanding compulsory military service for all, the conflict between people of Christian belief and the political structure appears ever more frequently.

Thus, in very recent times, more and more young people are refusing military service and prefer to endure all the cruel torments to which they are subjected, rather than betray God's commandment, as they understand it.

I happen to know of dozens of people in Russia who have suffered severe persecution on account of their faith, and others who are even now in prison. Here are the names of some of those who have been persecuted: Zalubovsky, Lubitch, Mokev, Druzhin, Izumchenko, Olkovitch, Farafanov, Ganja, Akulov, Tchaga, Cherchouk, Burov, Goncharenko, Sakharov, Tregubov, Volkhov, Koschavoi. And in prison now: Ikonikov, Kurtish, Varnavsky,

Orlov, Mokri, Molosai, Kudrin, Panshikov, Siksni, Debriabin, Kalachev, Bannov, Makrin.

I know of similar people in Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria. There are a very large number in Bulgaria. Moreover, in recent times, refusals made on the same grounds have begun to occur in the Muslim world: among the Babids in Persia, and among the so-called 'Legion of God' here in Russia, recently founded in the Kazan.

The ground for these refusals is always the same, the most natural, inevitable and incontrovertible. It is the recognition of the necessity of following the religious commandments, above and before the State laws, when the two conflict. The State law demanding military service, or in other words the readiness to kill at the command of others, cannot but be contrary to any of the religio-moral laws that are always based on love of one's neighbour. This is the same in all religions, not just Christianity, but Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Confucianism.

The very precise definition of the law of love, that does not permit any exclusions, revealed by Christ nineteen hundred years ago, is recognized today by morally sensitive people of all faiths, no longer as a result of following Christ, but through spontaneous awareness.

This is the only means of salvation.

It looks at first as if refusals to perform military duties are isolated instances relating only to military service, but this is not

the case. These refusals are in fact not just occasional acts, evoked by particular circumstances; they are the result of genuine and sincere observance of religious teachings. And this kind of observance naturally destroys the entire structure of life based on principles that are incompatible and contradictory to it. It destroys the structure, because if those who understand that participation in violence cannot be reconciled with Christianity did not become soldiers, tax collectors, judges, jury, policemen, or officials of any kind, the violence from which people now suffer would clearly not exist.

## CHAPTER 12

> ‘When you can say in all truth and with your whole heart: “My Lord, my God, do with me as you will”, only then will you free yourself from slavery and become completely free.
>
> A free man is only master of what he can master without impediment. And the only thing we are entirely free to master without impediment is ourselves. Therefore, if you see a person wishing to control not himself but others, you know that he is not free: he has become a slave of his desire to dominate people.’ (Epictetus[112])

But what can the hundreds, thousands, let us say hundreds of thousands of insignificant, powerless, isolated people do against the vast number of men who are bound to the State and equipped with all the powerful weapons of violence? The struggle seems not only unequal but impossible, and yet the outcome of this struggle is as little in doubt as the outcome between the struggle between the darkness of night and the light of dawn.

One of those young men imprisoned for refusing military service wrote the following:

‘Sometimes I get the chance of talking to the soldiers from the guardroom and I always smile sincerely when they say to me: “Hey lad, it’s no good spending the whole of your youth in prison.”

“It’s all right. Isn’t the end the same for everyone?” I reply to them.

“Well that may be so, but it wouldn’t be so bad if you’d serve in the regiment.”

“But my life here is more peaceful than yours in the regiment,” I say.

“So it may be. But it’s no good for you. You’ve spent four years here and if you’d been in the army you’d have been home long ago. Goodness knows when you’ll go free now,” they say ironically, laughing at me.

“Well suppose I’m all right here,” I say. They shake their heads and give it some thought. “It’s odd.”

‘The same kind of conversation goes on between myself and my cellmates, who are soldiers. One Jewish soldier says to me: “It’s astonishing. You put up with so much yet you’re always cheerful and alert.”

‘And when any one of my cellmates starts feeling dispirited and depressed the others say to him: “Look at you. Before you’ve had time to sit down you start pining. Look at the old dad here (as they call me on account of my little beard), look how long he’s been here and he still keeps cheerful!”

‘And thus, bit by bit the conversation builds up between us. We chatter away about nothing, or sometimes about serious matters, God, life, or whatever interests us. Or else one of us talks about his life in the country and then how good I feel, just listening. On the whole I really don’t do too badly here.’

This is what another writes:

‘I could not say that my inner life is always the same; there are moments of exhaustion and moments of joy.

‘At the moment I am feeling fine, but it still takes a lot of courage to look triumphantly at all the things that constantly happen in prison life. You try to penetrate to the depths of things and to persuade yourself that all this is but a moment in time, and you have been given more strength than is needed in the situation, and then joy lights up your heart again and you forget about everything that has happened. Thus life continues in this inner struggle.’

And a third writes:

‘I was tried on 28 March and sentenced to five years, five months and six days in prison. You would not believe how relieved and cheerful I felt after the trial: it was like the relief one feels after a heavy burden has been removed. I felt so light-hearted and bold after the trial, I wish I could feel as good forever!’

On the other hand the spiritual state of those who employ violence, submit to it, and participate in it is completely different. Instead of experiencing the natural and inherent feeling of love for their fellow men, all these millions of people carry only feelings of hatred, blame and fear towards all humanity, with the exception of the small circle of like-minded people to which they belong. They suppress all their human feelings to such an extent that murdering fellow men seems to them to be a necessary condition of well-being in life.

‘You talk of the cruelty of executions, but what else can we do with the scoundrels,’ say conservative-minded people today in

Russia. ‘In France things only calmed down after they had cut off goodness knows how many heads. Let them stop making and throwing bombs and we will stop hanging them.’

With the same inhuman cruelty the revolutionary leaders demand and desire the death of the government, and the revolutionary workers and peasants demand the death of the capitalists and landowners.

These people know that they are not behaving as men should behave, they are afraid, and tell lies and try to bring evil upon themselves in order not to see the truth. They stifle the truth that exists within them and which appeals to them, and they suffer, unceasingly, from the most cruel of all torments: the sufferings of the soul.

Some know that they are doing something that is natural to all people, which constitutes the aim towards which humanity is moving and which inevitably results in good, both for the individual and for the collectivity. Others, as much as they try to hide it from themselves, know that what they are doing is unnatural to man and against human nature, and is something from which humanity is continually withdrawing. They know that what they do creates suffering for the individual, for the collectivity and most of all for the person who is doing it. On the one hand is awareness of lack of freedom, fear and reticence; on the other freedom, peace and honesty. On the one hand, lack of faith, on the other, faith; on the one hand lies, on the other the

truth; on the one hand hatred, on the other, love; on the one hand the age-old torments of the past, on the other the incipient joys of the future. Thus what doubt can there be as to which side victory belongs to?

The irresistible truth was stated by the now deceased French writer when he wrote this wonderfully inspired letter: ‘Spiritual strength has never troubled man, has never exerted so much influence over him, as today. It is, so to speak, in the air the world breathes. Those few individual spirits who lived in isolation and wished for social regeneration have sought it bit by bit; they have sought one another out, beckoned to each other, approached one another, united, understood one another and formed a group, a centre of attraction towards which other souls now fly from the four corners of the earth, just as larks fly towards a mirror. Thus they have formed a general collective soul in order that the men of the future may jointly realize, consciously and irresistibly, the impending union and steady progress of nations that were recently enemies of each other. I find and recognize this new spirit in phenomena which seem most likely to refute it.

‘The arming of all nations, the threats made between government leaders, the re-emergence of racism, the enmity between fellow countrymen, and even the puerility of the events at the Sorbonne are really phenomena that look ominous but augur well. They are the final convulsions of something that is about to

vanish. The illness in this instance is the energetic attempts of an organism to free itself from a fatal element.

‘Those who have profited and who hope to profit for ever more from the errors of the past are uniting in order to prevent any change. The results of all this are the armaments, threats and prosecutions; but if you look more carefully you will see that it is all superficial. It is colossal but empty.

‘The spirit has gone: it has moved elsewhere. All these millions of armed men who practise daily in preparation for a universal war of extinction no longer hate those whom they must fight, and not one of the leaders has the courage to declare war. Recriminations can already be heard rising up from below and, recognizing their claim to justice with a great and sincere compassion, something above is already beginning to respond to them.

‘Mutual understanding inevitably approaches at an appointed time and it is far closer than we suppose. I do not know if this is because I am about to depart from the world and the light emanating from beyond the horizon has already clouded my vision, but I believe our world is entering an epoch where the words “Love one another” will be accepted without arguments about whether it was a man or a God who spoke them’ (Dumas, fils[113]).

Only by fulfilling the law of love in its true rather than limited meaning, i.e. as the supreme law that does not admit any

exceptions, can one find salvation from the terrible, increasingly disastrous, and apparently hopeless situation of the Christian nations today.

## CHAPTER 13

> ‘The social conditions of life can only be improved by people exercising self-restraint.’
>
> ‘It is said that one swallow does not make a summer, but can it be that because one swallow does not make a summer another swallow, sensing and anticipating summer, must not fly? If every blade of grass waited similarly summer would never occur. And it is the same with establishing the Kingdom of God: we must not think about whether we are the first or the thousandth swallow.’
>
> ‘Live your life fulfilling God’s will and you will know for sure that it is only by following this path that you most fruitfully enhance the overall improvement of life.’

‘A dreadful weight of evil hangs over the people of the world and oppresses them. The people standing beneath this weight are becoming more and more crushed by it, and are searching for a means of freeing themselves from it.

‘They know they can lift the weight and throw it off through joint effort; but they cannot agree to do it all together. Everyone is sinking lower and lower, leaving the weight to rest on someone else’s shoulders; the weight is pressing more and more heavily and would have crushed them long ago if it were not for people who are guided in their actions not so much by considerations of external behaviour, as by the inner compatibility between their behaviour and their conscience. These kind of people are, and always have been, Christians because instead of setting themselves an external goal which needs the cooperation of others to be achieved, they set themselves an inner goal, which requires cooperation from no one else and which is the essence of

Christianity in its true meaning. And this is why salvation from the enslavement in which the men of today find themselves is impossible for most of them, and can be, and is, achieved only through Christianity, by substituting the law of violence for the law of love.

'The general purpose of life cannot be fully known', says the Christian teaching, 'and you only imagine that it is a continual approach towards universal well-being and the realization of the Kingdom of God. The purpose of your personal life is most certainly known to you and consists of the realization in yourself of the greatest perfection of love, which is necessary to the realization of the Kingdom of God. And this aim is always known to you and is always attainable.

'You may not know the best individual, external aims, there may be obstacles in the way of achieving them, but the approach to inner perfection and the increase of love within yourself and others cannot be stopped by anyone or anything.

'A person only needs to set himself, instead of the false, external, social aim, the one true, irrefutable, and attainable inner aim of life for all the chains, by which he seemed so indissolubly bound, to fall apart, and he will feel perfectly free…

'A Christian is not bound by civil law because he has no need of it, either for himself or for others, since he considers human life better provided for by the law of love which he professes, than by a law maintained by violence…

‘For a Christian who has recognized the demands of the law of love, none of the demands of the law of violence can be obligatory, but present themselves as human errors which must be exposed and abolished…

‘The profession of Christianity in its true meaning, including non-resistance to evil, frees men from all external power. But it not only frees them from external power, it also gives them the possibility of attaining those improvements of life which they vainly seek through altering the external forms of life, whereas changes in life’s external forms are always a consequence of shifts in consciousness; life is only improved to the extent to which this change is based on modified consciousness.

‘All external changes of life’s forms that are not founded on shifts in consciousness not only fail to improve people’s situation but, by and large, worsen it. It was not government decrees that abolished child-beating, torture and slavery, but a change in people’s consciousness that called for the necessity of these decrees. And life is only improved as far as it is based on modified consciousness; that is, to the extent that in people’s consciousness the law of violence is exchanged for the law of love. People think that if a shift in consciousness influences the forms of life, it must also work the other way, and since it is more pleasant, easy and the effect more apparent, to direct energy at external changes, they always prefer to direct their energy not at changing consciousness but at changing forms. Therefore for the most part

they are preoccupied not with the essential matter, but with some semblance of it. The external, vain and useless activity based on establishing and adapting the external forms of life shields people from the essential inner activity, which alone can improve their lives. And this superstition, more than anything else, hinders the general improvement of people's lives.

'A better life can only come when the consciousness of men is altered for the better; and therefore, those who wish to improve life must direct all their efforts towards changing both their own and other people's consciousness.

'Christianity in its true meaning, and only this kind of Christianity, frees people from the slavery in which they find themselves today, and it is only this that affords men the possibility of genuine improvement in both their personal lives, and life in general.

'It would seem obvious that only true Christianity, excluding violence, gives salvation to each individual person and provides the possibility of improving the overall life of humanity. But people could not accept this until life under the law of violence has been fully tasted, and until the field of delusions, cruelties and sufferings had been explored in every direction.

'The fact that Christ's teaching has been known to man for nineteen hundred years, and yet has only been adopted in its external forms, is often cited as the most convincing proof of the falsity, and especially the impracticability, of Christ's teaching.

People say: “If it has been known for so long and has still not become the guiding force in people’s lives, if so many martyrs and professed Christians have died to no purpose without having altered the existing order, this clearly indicates that the teaching is untrue and impracticable.”

‘To think this and say it is much the same as saying that if seeds that are sown fail to blossom and give fruit, but lie in the soil and rot, this proves that the seed is not genuine and fertile, and should, and must, be trampled underfoot.

‘The fact that the Christian teaching was not adopted in its full meaning at the time of its appearance, but was only adopted in its external, perverted aspects, was both inevitable and necessary.

‘A doctrine that undermined the entire existing order of the world could not have been accepted at the time of its appearance, but could only have been accepted in an external, distorted form.

‘The great majority of people at the time were in no position to understand Christ’s teaching by following the spiritual path alone. It was necessary to bring them to an understanding of it by experiencing the truth, that all deviations from the Christian teaching are disastrous, and by learning this the hard way.

‘The teaching was adopted in the only form it could be: as an external worship of deity that replaced paganism, while life continued further and further along the heathen path. But this perverted teaching was inextricably bound to the Gospels and, despite all their efforts, the priests of false Christianity could not

conceal from people the essence of the teaching which, against their will, gradually revealed itself to men, and entered their consciousness.

‘Over the course of eighteen centuries this dual trend has continued: the positive and the negative. On the one hand is the ever-increasing alienation of man from the possibility of a good and reasonable life; on the other, the ever-increasing elucidation of the true meaning of the teaching.

‘And today this process has reached the point where the Christian truth, formerly only recognized by a few, endowed with a keen religious sentiment, has been made accessible, in some of its aspects, to even the simplest people, through the doctrines of the Socialists; and yet life contradicts this truth at every step in the most crude and obvious way.

‘The situation of our European humanity, with its private landowners, taxes, clergy, prisons, guillotines, fortresses, cannons, dynamite, millionaires and beggars, looks truly terrible. But it only appears so. In truth, all these things, all these horrors that are happening now, as well as those we await, are things that we do and are prepared to do ourselves. And this must cease. In order to conform to human consciousness this must not be so. For power does not lie in the forms of life but in human consciousness. And human consciousness is in an extremely strained condition, drawn between two opposite poles, full of screaming contradictions. Christ said that He conquered the world, and indeed He did. Evil,

however dreadful it is, no longer exists, because it no longer exists in people's consciousness.

'The growth of consciousness proceeds at an even pace rather than in leaps and bounds, and it is never possible to pin-point the feature that separates one period of existence from another, although that feature exists, just as there is a dividing line between childhood and youth, winter and spring, etc. If there is no definite dividing line, there is a transitory period. And it is this sort of transitory period that mankind is passing through at the moment. Everything is ready to make the transition from one condition to another. Only a slight push is needed in order to complete the change. And this push could be given at any moment. Society's awareness has already rejected the former way of life and has long been ready to adopt a new one. Everyone alike knows and feels this. But the inertia of the past and timidity of the future can sometimes create a situation whereby what has long been consciously known takes a while to be put into practice. At such moments one word is sometimes enough for consciousness to be consolidated: that all important force in human life – public opinion – may suddenly turn the existing order inside out without struggle or violence…

'The salvation of men from oppression, enslavement and ignorance will not be achieved through resolutions, nor through trade unions or world congresses, but through the simplest of methods: by every single person who is called upon to participate

in violence over his fellow men and his own self recognizing the true spiritual “I” within himself, and asking in amazement, “Well, why should I do that?”

‘It is neither resolutions, nor the subtle, clever Socialist and Communist structures of unions, arbitrations, etc, that will serve mankind, but only when this spiritual awareness becomes general.

‘It is really only necessary for man to rouse himself from the hypnosis that shields him from the true Christian vocation in order for him not only to refuse to comply with the demands the government makes of him, but to feel terrible surprise and indignation at the fact of these demands being made.’

‘And this awakening can occur at any moment.’ This is what I wrote fifteen years ago. Today I can boldly write that this awakening is taking place. I, with my eighty years, know that I will not see it, but as surely as I know that spring follows winter and day follows night, I know that the time has come for Christian humanity.

## CHAPTER 14

‘By its nature the human soul is Christian; Christianity is always adopted by people as something forgotten and suddenly remembered… Christianity raises man to a height revealing a world of happiness, governed by the law of reason. The feeling on discovering the truth of Christianity is similar to that experienced by a man who has been locked in a dark, stuffy tower and then climbs to the highest platform on the battlements, from where he can see a beautiful world he has never seen before.

The consciousness of submitting to human law is enslaving; the consciousness of submitting to God’s law is liberating.’

‘One of the certain conditions of man’s task is the fact that the further away the goal of our strivings, and the less we desire to see the fruits of our labour ourselves, the greater and more extensive the measure of our success.’ (John Ruskin)

‘The most important and necessary work both for the man performing it and for others is that of which he does not see the results.’

‘This may all be so, but in order for men to free themselves from the way of life founded on violence, in which they are entangled and trapped, it is necessary for all men to be religious: that is, prepared for the sake of fulfilling God’s law to sacrifice their bodily and personal welfare; and to live for the present, not for the future, striving for the present only to fulfil the will of God, revealed to them through love. But the people of our world are not religious, and therefore cannot live in this way.’

This is what people are saying today, as if suggesting that religious consciousness, or faith, is a condition unnatural to man,

as if it is something exceptional that must be taught and instilled in him. But this is only said by people who, as a result of a particular condition of the Christian world, are temporarily lacking in the most essential and natural condition of human life: faith.

Such an objection is similar to that made by a person who objects to the necessity of work as a necessary condition of human welfare by saying that in order to work one must have the strength to do it. But what about those who are so unaccustomed to work that they cannot, do not know how to, or do not have the physical strength to do it?

Just as work is not something artificial, contrived and ordained by man, but is something unavoidable, without which man cannot live, the same is true of faith, that is to say the awareness of one's relationship to the Infinite, and the guidance for conduct that results from it. This kind of faith is not something artificial and exceptional that is taught, but on the contrary, it is the most natural feature of human nature, without which man, like a bird without wings, has never, and could never, live.

If we today, in our Christian world, see people lacking in religious awareness (or more strictly speaking, not lacking, but with an obscured religious awareness), this unnatural, abnormal situation is but a temporary and fortuitous condition of the few, and results from those particular circumstances in which the people of the Christian world have lived, and are living, and is just as

exceptional as the position of those who live, and are able to live, without working.

And in order for people who have lost this feeling, so inherent and essential to life, to experience it anew, they do not need to invent or establish anything, but need only to eliminate that lie which has temporarily concealed and obscured this feeling from them.

If the men of our world could only be free of the deceit of the Church religion, which distorts the Christian teaching, and from the justification and exaltation of a political structure based on this deception, which is incompatible with Christianity but which is supported by that teaching, then, not only for all Christians, but for all the world, the chief obstacle to religious awareness of the supreme law of love, permitting no exception and no violence, which was revealed to humanity 1900 years ago, and which now alone satisfies the demands of the human conscience, would disappear from men's souls of its own accord.

And when this law penetrates consciousness as the SUPREME law of life it will, of its own accord, bring an end to that attitude, so harmful to morality, whereby the most extraordinary injustices and cruelties people perform on one another are regarded as natural, inherently human behaviour. And that which is dreamed of, desired and promised by the Socialist and Communist regimes of future societies will come to pass, and more besides. And this will be achieved by quite different means; it will be achieved precisely

because it will not be sought through the contradictory means of violence, which both the government and its opponents employ in order to achieve it. Freedom from the evil which torments and corrupts men will be attained, not by strengthening and preserving the existing regimes, monarchies, republics or whatever, nor by suppressing the existing order and instituting better Socialist or Communist ones; indeed not in any instance by a few people inventing a particular social system they consider an improvement and imposing it on others by violence. It will be attained only when each one of us (the majority of people), without thinking or worrying about the consequences to ourselves or others, conduct our lives in a particular way, not for the sake of some social organization, but simply for the sake of fulfilling, for one's own self and one's own life, the supreme law of life: the law of love that does not permit violence under any circumstances.

# CHAPTER 15

> ‘It is far more natural to conceive of a society of people governed by reasonable, advantageous laws, that are recognized by everyone, than of the society in which people live today, obeying only violence.’
>
> ‘The man who has not yet awoken to the truth sees political power as various sacred institutions, like the organs of a living body forming the essential conditions of life. For the man who has awakened to the truth, these people appear very mistaken, for they have attributed to themselves some kind of fantastic significance without any rational justification for it, and they fulfil their desires through violence. He who sees the mistake also regards the majority of these ensnared men doing violence to one another as highway robbers, who grab people on the road and violate them. The antiquity, scale and organization of violence cannot alter the nature of the deed. The man awakened does not believe in the thing called the State and sees no justification for all the acts of violence performed in the name of the State: therefore he cannot participate in them. State violence diminishes not as a result of external factors, but only through the awareness of those who have woken to the truth.
>
> Perhaps political violence was necessary to man’s former existence, perhaps it is still necessary now, but people cannot help seeing, and foreseeing, a way of life where violence can only interfere with peaceful existence. And, seeing and foreseeing this, people cannot help striving to realize such an order. And the means of realizing it lie in inner perfection and non-participation in violence.’

‘But how can we live without a government, and without authority? People have never lived this way,’ is the retort to this.

People are so accustomed to the political structure in which they live that to them it seems an unavoidable, permanent form of human existence. But it only seems so: people have lived, and do live, outside the political structure. All the primitive peoples who

have not yet reached what we call civilization have lived and still live in this way. So also do people who have reached an understanding of life that is higher than civilization: Christian communities exist in Europe, in America and particularly in Russia, where the members have rejected the State; they feel no need of it and only put up with interference from it, when they cannot avoid doing so.

The State is only a temporary thing and in no way a permanent feature of human life. Just as the life of an individual person is not static, but is continually changing, moving forward and perfecting itself, so too the life of the whole of humanity does not cease to change, to move on and perfect itself. Each separate individual has at some point in his life drunk from his mother's breast, played with toys, studied, worked, married, raised children, freed himself from passion and grown wiser with age. And the life of a nation grows wiser and perfects itself in the same way, only not within a period of years, as with people, but over the course of centuries and millennia. As with people, the main changes occur in the spiritual, invisible realms, so too with humanity the main changes occur, first and foremost, in the invisible sphere of religious consciousness.

And just as in the individual these changes take place so gradually that it is never possible to pin-point the hour, the day or the month when a child ceased to be a child and became a youth and then a man, we nevertheless know for certain once this

transition has occurred. Likewise we can never pin-point the period when humanity, or a particular part of it, has outlived one religious age and entered into another one. But just as we know that the former child has become a youth, we know that humanity, or a part of it, has outlived one period of religious growth and entered into another, higher one, once the transition has taken place.

This sort of transition from one period of human development to another is ocurring today in the life of the Christian nations.

We do not know the hour when a child becomes a youth, but we know that the former child no longer plays children's games. Similarly we cannot name the year, nor even the decade, when the Christian world passed from its earlier form of life and entered another age, distinguished by its religious awareness, but we cannot help knowing and seeing that the people of the Christian world can no longer seriously play at war games, monarchical audiences, diplomatic artifice, or at constitutions with chambers and dumas, or at party politics whether socialist-evolutionary, democratic, anarchic, or revolutionary. And, above all, we cannot continue to do all these things, basing them on violence.

This is especially noticeable now here in Russia with our external changes in the political structure. The serious-minded Russian people can now no longer help feeling towards all the new forms of government that have been introduced, as an adult would feel if he were given a new toy, that he had not possessed as a

child. However new and interesting the toy may be, he does not need it and can only regard it with amusement. This is how it is with us in Russia; it is the attitude all thinking men, as well as the vast masses of the population, have towards our constitution, the Duma, the various revolutionary parties and unions. Although it is not obvious, I believe I am not mistaken in saying that the Russian people of our time can no longer seriously believe that man's vocation in this life is to employ the short interval allotted him between birth and death in making speeches in the chambers, or to gatherings of Socialist comrades, or in judging one's neighbours in law courts, or in capturing, imprisoning and murdering them, or in throwing bombs and seizing their land; nor in worrying about whether Finland, India, Poland and Korea can be made part of what is called Russia, England, Prussia, Japan; nor in liberating these countries by force and being prepared for mass murder of one another. A man of our times cannot, in the depths of his soul, help recognizing the absurdity of all these activities.

The only reason we fail to see the full horror of the life we lead, so contradictory to human nature, is because all the horrors in the midst of which we quietly live have crept in so gradually that we have failed to notice them. It befell me in the course of my life to see a neglected old man in the most dreadful state: his body was teeming with worms, he could not move a single limb without suffering, yet he did not realize the full horror of his predicament because it had crept upon him so imperceptibly. He asked only for tea and sugar. The same happens in our lives: we do not see the

horror simply because the approach to the situation has been made with such quiet little steps that we do not notice the full extent of the horror, but simply take pleasure in new cameras and motor cars, as the old man took pleasure in tea and sugar. Apart from the fact that there is nothing to lead us to suppose that the abolition of violence men use against each other and which is so contradictory to reasonable, loving human nature, would worsen rather then ameliorate the human predicament, apart from that society's present condition is so utterly dreadful that it would be hard to imagine anything worse.

Therefore, the question of whether people can live without governments is not frightening, whatever way the defendants of the existing order like to imagine it, but it is as farcical as it would be to ask a tortured man how he would live if they were to stop torturing him.

People who stand in an exclusively privileged position as a result of the existing political structure imagine that to deprive people of governmental authority would lead to tremendous strife and that everyone would be at war with everyone else. It is just as if they were speaking of the co-existence not of animals (animals live peacefully without any political coercion) but of some dreadful creatures whose behaviour is governed by nothing except hatred and madness. But they only imagine men to be like this because they attribute to them qualities contrary to their nature, but which have been nurtured by that very same governmental structure

under which they themselves have grown up and which they continue to support, despite its being absolutely unnecessary and harmful.

Therefore, to the question of what life would be like without government and authorities, the answer can only be that there would certainly not be all the evil which government creates. There would be no private landownership, no taxes spent on things unnecessary to the nation, no division of nations, no enslavement of some by others, no more wastage of the nation's best resources on war preparation, no more fear on the one hand of the bombs, on the other of the gallows; and there would be none of the senseless luxury of some, and still more senseless poverty of others.

# CHAPTER 16

> ‘We live in an age of discipline, culture and civilization, but it is still far from being a moral age. Under the present conditions people can say that the happiness of the State grows alongside the misery of the people. And there remains the question of whether we might not be happier living in a primitive condition where we would have none of our present culture.
>
> For how does one make people happy without making them moral and wise?’ (Kant)
>
> ‘Try to live in such a way that you have no need of violence.’
>
> ‘We are very accustomed to arguing about how we might organize the lives of others, of humanity as a whole. And we find nothing strange in such deliberations. Whereas these sort of arguments could never exist between religious, and thereby free people. These arguments are the very results of despotism or the domination of one, or a few, over many.
>
> This is how both despots and those perverted by them reason.
>
> This mistake is harmful, not only because it torments and perverts those people beneath the despot’s control, but because the awareness of the necessity of reforming oneself diminishes in all men, whereas it is the only true method of influencing others. Not only has one man no right to give orders to a number of men, but neither have a number of men the right to give orders to one.’ (V. Chertkov [114])

‘Yes, but what form would human existence take without a government?’ ask people, who evidently think that we always know what form life will take, and in what form it will continue, and that those who have decided to live without a government must, therefore, know beforehand the form life will take. But really, we have never known and can never know what shape the future will take. The conviction that men can know and can even arrange the form of the future is really a very primitive, albeit old

and widespread, superstition. Regardless of whether or not people should submit to the government, the fact is they have never known and do not and cannot know the form their lives will take. Still less can a minority organize the lives of the rest as they please, since life never shapes itself according to the will of a few, but rather according to many complex reasons, independent of the will of any minority; the most important reason being the moral and religious condition of the majority of people within society.

The superstition that some people can not only know in advance the form that the lives of others, the majority, will take, but can also arrange this future existence, has arisen and is maintained by the wish of those exerting violence to justify their activity, and by the wish of those suffering from the violence to clarify and ease the burden of the violence they experience. Those who commit violence convince themselves, and others, that they know what must be done in order for people's lives to assume that form they consider best. And the people who suffer the violence will, until they have the strength to overthrow it, believe this, because it is only such a belief that gives some kind of meaning to their predicament.

One would think history should have destroyed this superstition entirely.

At the end of the eighteenth century a few Frenchmen maintained a despotic, monarchical structure through violence, but despite all their efforts, this structure was destroyed and replaced

by a Republic. In just the same way, despite all the efforts of the Republican leaders to maintain the system, and albeit with the utmost violence, the Napoleonic Empire replaced the Republic; this in turn was replaced, against the will of its leaders, by a coalition government and not an hereditary empire. And so it went on: Charles X, a constitution, another revolution, another republic to be replaced by Louis Philippe and so on, up until the present Republic. And the same thing has occurred in all coercive human activities. All the efforts of the papacy, far from annihilating the possibility of Protestantism, provoke it. All the efforts of capitalism only strengthen the Socialist tendencies. If a political system established by force is maintained for a certain length of time, or is altered by force, it is only because at the given time certain forms ceased to be pertinent to the general condition, and more importantly to the spiritual condition of the people, and not because someone has upheld them or reconstructed them.

And so the belief that some people, the minority, can arrange the lives of the majority – a thing that is regarded as the most indisputable truth in the name of which the greatest crimes are committed – is only a superstition. The activity founded on this superstition, the political activities of the revolutionaries as well as the rulers and their assistants, generally regarded as a most honourable and important matter, is really a most futile, and moreover harmful, human occupation and has been and still is the greatest hindrance to achieving the true well-being of humanity. Rivers of blood have been shed and are being shed in the name of

this superstition, and inestimable suffering has been, and is being, endured by people on account of the ridiculous and harmful activities resulting from this superstition. And, worst of all, while rivers of blood have been and are being shed in the name of this superstition, it is precisely this that forms the greatest obstacle to society's successful creation of those particular improvements in life appropriate to our time, and to the level of development reached by human consciousness. The superstition prevents genuine progress, chiefly because people, under the pretext of preserving and strengthening, or altering and improving, social conditions, put all their energy into influencing other people, thus neglecting their own inner task of self-perfection, which alone can enhance a change in the structure of society as a whole.

Human life in its totality advances and cannot help moving forward towards the eternal ideal of perfection, only if each individual person advances towards his own, personal and unrestricted perfection.

What a frightening, destructive superstition this is, under the influence of which people ignore their inner duty, which is the only thing really necessary for their own and society's well-being, and the only thing genuinely within their power, and direct all their efforts towards arranging the lives of others (something beyond their power). And in order to attain this impossible goal they employ violent means that are certainly as harmful to themselves

as to others, and which most surely alienate them from both personal and general perfection!

## CHAPTER 17

> ‘Man need only divert his attention from searching for the solution to external questions and pose the one, true inner question of how he should lead his life, and all the external questions will be resolved in the best possible way.
>
> We do not and cannot know what general welfare consists of, but we know very well that it can only be achieved through fulfilling the law of goodness that has been revealed to us.’
>
> ‘If only instead of wishing to save the world people wished to save themselves, to liberate themselves rather than humanity, they would be doing so much more for the salvation of the world and the freedom of humanity.’ (Herzen[115])
>
> ‘In both personal and public life there is only one law: if you wish to improve life, be prepared to sacrifice it.’
>
> ‘Go about the business of your life fulfilling God’s will and you can be certain of enhancing the overall improvement of life in the most fruitful way.’

‘All that may be true, but it will only be reasonable to abstain from violence when all, or the majority of people, understand how disadvantageous, unnecessary and irrational violence is. Until this happens what can the individual person do? Should he really not defend himself? Should he really leave his life and the fates of those dear to him in the hands of evil and cruel people?’

So the question of what I should do to counteract acts of violence committed before my eyes is always based on the same primitive superstition that it is possible for man not only to know, but to organize, the future in the way he likes. For a man free of this superstition the question does not and cannot exist.

A rogue has raised his knife over his victim. I have a pistol in my hand and kill him. But I do not know, and cannot possibly know, whether the purpose of the raised knife would have been implemented. The rogue may not have carried out his evil intention, whereas I certainly commit my evil deed. Therefore, the only thing that a person can and must do in this and similar instances is what he must always do in all possible circumstances: he must do what he believes he ought to do before God and before his own conscience. A man's conscience may demand that he sacrifice his own life but not that of another person. The same principle can be applied to the method of counteracting social evil.

Thus, to the question of what a person should do in the face of the evil committed by one, or a number of persons, the answer given by a man free of the superstition that it is possible to foresee, and to employ violence to organize, the conditions of the future, is always the same: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

'But he steals, robs and murders, and I do not steal, rob and murder. Let him fulfil the law of reciprocity and then ask me to fulfil it,' is what the people of our world usually say, and with greater conviction the higher their social standing. 'I do not steal, rob and kill,' say the governor, the minister, the general, the judge, the landowner, the merchant, the soldier, the policeman. The superstition of a social structure that justifies all kinds of violence has clouded the consciences of today's people to such an extent

that they do not see the continual, never-ending acts of theft and murder that are committed in the name of this superstition of the future order of the world; for all they see are those rare attempts at violence committed by men who are called murderers, robbers or thieves, but who cannot justify their violence as being done in the name of welfare.

'He is a thief, a liar, a robber, he is a murderer and does not observe the rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Who says this? It is said by those very people who do not cease murdering in war and forcing people to prepare for carnage, and who steal and rob from both their own and other nations.

If the law of doing to others as you would have them do unto you has become ineffective against those members of our society called murderers, robbers and thieves, it is only because these people comprise a section of the vast majority of the population who, for generation after generation, have been continually killed, robbed and pillaged by men whose superstition prevented them from seeing the criminality of their actions.

And therefore, to the question of how to relate to those people who attempt to commit all kinds of violence against us, the only answer is: 'Stop doing unto others, that which you would not have them do unto you.'

Not to mention the complete injustice of applying the obsolete law of retribution in certain instances of violence, while the most

dreadful and cruel acts of violence, committed by the State in the name of a superstition of organizing the future, are left unpunished; putting this aside, the application of crude retribution for acts of violence committed by those called robbers and thieves is, nevertheless, also blatantly irrational, and leads directly to the opposite of what is intended, since it destroys the tremendous power of public opinion, which is one hundred times more effective in protecting people from all kinds of violence than are gallows and prisons.

And this argument can be applied with striking pertinence to international relations: 'What must we do when savages come and take away the fruits of our labour and our wives and daughters?' say those who think only of the possibility of protecting themselves from the very same evil deeds and crimes which, they forget, they are continually committing against other nations. White men speak of the 'Yellow Peril', and with far more reason for doing so the Indians, Chinese, and Japanese speak of the 'White Peril'. For it is only necessary to be free of the superstition condoning violence in order to be horrified by all those crimes that have been, and are, committed by some nations against others, and to feel still more horrified by the moral torpor of the people that results from that superstition and enables English, Russians, Germans and Americans to speak (in the face of the most dreadful crimes they have committed and continue to commit in India, Indochina, Poland, Manchuria and Algeria) not just of the dangers of the

violence threatening them, but of the necessity of protecting themselves from it.

The dreadful superstition that it is possible to foresee the future shape of society serves to justify all kinds of violence in the name of that structure. It is enough for a person to free his thoughts, even temporarily, of this superstition and to look sincerely and seriously at the life of the nation for it to become clear to him that *acceptance of the need to oppose evil with violence is nothing other than the justification people give to their habitual and favourite vices*: *vengeance*, *avarice*, *envy*, *ambition*, *pride*, *cowardice and spite*,.

## CHAPTER 18

> ‘The Creator himself pre-ordained that the criterion of all human behaviour was not profit but justice, and on the strength of this all efforts to define levels of profit are always useless. Not one person has ever known, or can know, what the final results of a certain action, or series of actions, will be, either for himself or for others. But each one of us can know which action is just and which is not. And likewise, we can all know that the consequences of justice will, at the end of the day, be as good for ourselves as for others, although it is beyond our power to say beforehand what this good will be and of what it will consist.’ (John Ruskin)
>
> ‘And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free’ (John, VIII, 32)
>
> ‘Man thinks therefore he is. It is clear that he must think rationally. A rationally thinking person thinks first of all about the purpose for which he must live; he thinks about his soul and about God. Just look at what worldly people think about; of anything you like except that. They think about dancing, about music and singing and similar entertainments; they think about buildings, about wealth, about power; they envy kings and the rich. But they never think about what it means to be a man.’ (Pascal[116])

All you suffering men of the Christian world, both rulers and rich and poor and oppressed, need only free yourselves from the deception of false Christianity and government (concealing what Christ revealed to you and what is demanded by your reason and your heart) and it will become clear to you that it is in yourselves and only in yourselves that you will find the cause of all the bodily suffering (want), and spiritual suffering (awareness of injustice, envy and annoyance) that torments you – the oppressed and poor. And that it is also in yourselves, the rich and powerful, that you will find the cause of those fears, pangs of conscience and

awareness of the sinfulness of your lives, all of which disturbs you, in varying degrees according to your moral sensitivity.

Understand, all of you, that you were born neither to be slaves, nor to be masters; that you are free men, but that you only become free and rational when you fulfil the supreme law of life. This law has been revealed to you, and you need only discard those lies which conceal it from you to be able to see clearly of what this law consists and in what your happiness consists. This law consists in love, and well-being is only found in the fulfilment of this law. Realize it and you will become truly free and acquire everything that you now vainly seek through those complicated means to which you are attracted by confused and corrupted men, who believe in nothing.

'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matt., 1, 28–31). You will be saved and delivered from the evil you endure and receive the true well-being you so clumsily strive after, not through personal desire, nor envy, nor through adherence to a party programme; nor through hatred, indignation or the pursuit of fame, nor even through a sense of justice, and above all not through troubling yourselves about the organization of other people's lives. However strange it may seem, it is only through an

activity within your own soul, involving no external aim and no consideration of what might come of it.

Understand that the assumption that a man may organize the lives of others is a crude superstition that people have only accepted because of its antiquity. And understand that those who are preoccupied with organizing the lives of others, be they monarchs, presidents and ministers, or spies and executioners, or members and leaders of a party, or dictators, understand that these people manifest nothing worthy – as people seem to think – but, to the contrary, are pitiable, deeply misled people, preoccupied with a task that is not only vain and stupid, but is one of the most horrible things man can choose to do.

People are already recognizing the pitiful degradation of a spy, or executioner, and are starting to feel the same about the police force, police agents, and even to some extent about the army; but they have not yet begun to feel this about judges, senators, ministers, political leaders and revolutionaries. And yet the work of the senator, the minister, the monarch, and the leaders of political parties is just as base, vile and alien to human nature and, perhaps, even worse than the task of the executioner or spy, since it is just the same, but covered in hypocrisy.

Understand then, all of you, especially you young ones, that to dedicate your lives, or even to occupy yourselves with the forcible construction of other people's lives, according to your own ideas, is not just a primitive superstition, but a vile, criminal affair,

destructive to the soul. Realize that the desires of an enlightened soul for the welfare of others is in no way satisfied by vainly organizing their lives through violence, but that it is only achieved through one's own inner work – the only thing where man has complete freedom and control. Only this task, increasing the love within oneself, can enhance the satisfaction of this desire. You must understand that no activity aimed at the organization of other people's lives through coercion can enhance people's welfare, but is always a more or less consciously hypocritical deceit used to cover up men's basest desires: vanity, pride and self-interest, under the guise of personal dedication to mankind.

Understand this, especially you young ones, the generation of the future, and cease, as the majority of us are doing at the moment, to search for illusory happiness in creating people's welfare by participating in the administration of the State, or judiciary, or by instructing others and, in order to do so, by entering institutions (namely schools and universities) where you are involved in vanity, self-importance and pride, and thus perverted. Cease participating in the various organizations whose aim is supposedly to further the welfare of the masses, and seek only that one thing that is always necessary and within the reach of us all, and which gives the greatest well-being to ourselves, and is the most likely thing to enhance the welfare of our neighbours. Seek this one thing within yourselves: an increase of love through eradicating all the mistakes, sins and passions which hinder its manifestation and you will further the well-being of the people in

the most effective way. Understand that for the people of today the fulfilment of the supreme law of love now known to us (which excludes violence) is as unavoidable as is the law of migration and nest-building for birds, and the law of feeding on grass for herbivorous animals, and on meat for carnivorous ones; and that every transgression of this law is detrimental to us.

Just understand this and dedicate your life to this joyous work; only begin to do this and you will instantly realize that it is this, and only this, which can lead to that improvement of life for all, for which you strive so vainly and along such mistaken paths. Realize that man's welfare lies only in unity and that unity cannot be attained through violent means. Unity will only be achieved when, without thinking about unity, each person thinks only of fulfilling the law of life. And it is only the SUPREME law of life, one and the same for us all, that unites people.

The supreme law of life revealed by Christ is now clear to man and unity will only be achieved through following it, until there appears a new law that is even closer and dearer to the hearts of man.

## CHAPTER 19

> ‘Some people seek well-being, or happiness, in power, others seek it in science or in sensuality. Those who are truly close to bliss realize that it cannot exist in something that only a few, rather than everyone, can possess. They realize that the genuine well-being of man is such that all people can possess it at once, without division and without jealousy; it is such that no one can lose it unless he wants to.’ (Pascal[117])
>
> ‘We have one, and only one, infallible guide: the eternal spirit that penetrates each and every one of us in unity and fills us with the ambition to attain that which we ought; it is the same spirit that urges the tree to grow towards the sun, the flower to drop its seeds in autumn, and which urges us to strive after God, thereby uniting ourselves.’
>
> ‘We are not attracted to genuine belief by the well-being the believer is promised, but by something that manifests itself as the only recourse to deliverance from all misfortune and death.’
>
> ‘Salvation does not lie in the rituals and profession of faith, but in a lucid understanding of the meaning of one’s life.’

This is all I wanted to say.

I wanted to say that we have now reached a situation in which we can no longer remain, and that whether we like it or not, we must enter a new path of existence and, in order for us to do that, we do not need to invent either a new faith, or new scientific theories, that might explain the meaning of life and guide it. And, above all, we do not need any particular kind of activity, except to free ourselves from the superstitions, of false Christianity and political structures alike.

Simply let everyone understand that he has neither the right nor the possibility of organizing other people’s lives and that the task

of each man is only to observe his own life in accordance with the supreme religious law revealed to him, and this in itself will obviate that tortuous, bestial order of life existing amongst the Christian nations which is so contrary to the requirements of our souls, and growing worse and worse.

Whoever you may be: tsar, judge, landowner, craftsman or beggar, think about it and take pity, take pity on your soul… For however obscured and stupefied you may be by your sovereignty, power or wealth, however exhausted and numbed you may be by your needs and grudges, like all of us you possess, or rather you manifest, that spirit of God that exists in us all and which now says to you, clearly and comprehensibly: why and for what purpose do you torment yourselves and all the others with whom you come into contact in this world? Just realize who you are, how insignificant, on the one hand, is that which you mistakenly call yourself, identifying it as your body; and how immensely great is that which is really you: your spiritual being. Just realize this and begin to spend each moment of your life living not for external ideals, but in fulfilling the true purpose of your life, which has been revealed to you through the wisdom of the whole world, the teachings of Christ, and your own personal awareness. Begin to live by seeing the purpose and well-being of your life in the daily progress of your soul's liberation from the illusions of the flesh, and in the increasing perfection of love (which amounts to one and the same thing). Just begin to do this and from the first day, the first hour, you will experience a new and joyous sensation of the

awareness of complete freedom and well-being flowing ever increasingly into your soul. And what will strike you most of all is how those very external circumstances which troubled you so much, but which were nevertheless so far from your desires, cease (whether they leave you in the same external situation, or whether they lead you out of it) to be a hindrance, and become greater and greater joys of your life.

And if you are unhappy – and I know that you are unhappy – remember that what has been suggested here was not invented by me, but is the fruit of the spiritual works of all the best and loftiest minds and hearts of mankind, and is the only means of deliverance from your unhappiness, providing the greatest well-being man can attain in this life.

This is what I wanted to say to my fellow men before I die.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 3

The most dangerous people have been hanged, or are serving sentences in penal battalions, fortresses and prisons; tens of thousands of others, less dangerous, have been driven out of the capital cities and big towns and are wandering around Russia, bedraggled and hungry; the ordinary police arrest, the secret police pursue; all books and newspapers dangerous to the government are withdrawn from circulation. In the Duma debates go on between various party spokesmen as to how to protect the welfare of the people: should or should not fleets be built? Should peasant land-ownership be organized in this way or that way? How and why a Council of Churches should, or should not, be held. There are leaders who dally in lobbies, there are quorums, blocs, premiers and everything else down to the last detail, exactly as in all civilized nations. It would seem that we need nothing more. And yet, the collapse of the existing structure is drawing closer and closer, precisely here and precisely now, in Russia.

Fine then, you government people, hang and shoot another five, ten, or thirty thousand, as imitating former repressions of revolutions in Europe you clearly intend to do. Fine then, go ahead. But you know, as well as the noose, the gallows, spies, prisons, rifles, rifle-butts, etc., there are spiritual forces that are extremely strong and far more powerful than any sort of gallows or prison. You see, all those you strangle with ropes and shoot above graves dug out by men still living had and have fathers,

brothers, wives, sisters, friends and like-minded followers, and if these executions spare you from those who are buried in the graves they generate, not only among those who were close to them, but among strangers too, twice as many enemies, twice as pernicious as those you have killed and buried in the earth. The more people you murder, the smaller the chance of saving yourselves from your chief enemy: the hatred people feel towards you. By your crimes you only increase this hatred tenfold and make it more dangerous to yourselves.

Apart from increasing the number of your enemies and their hatred, through those you execute, these very executions increase, even among men who are perfect strangers to yourselves and your enemies, that feeling of cruelty and immorality you think you are combating with these executions. For these executions are not performed automatically by the papers which you write in your law courts and ministries. People are executed by other people. A young man, a former soldier, evidently perplexed as to how he should react to this, told me of how he was made to dig a trench, a grave for ten people sentenced to be shot, and how some soldiers were forced to shoot these condemned men, while others had to stand with loaded rifles behind the executioners ready to shoot them should they hesitate in fulfilling the ghastly, inhuman task demanded of them. Can the performance of such dreadful acts, at the command of authorities whom men have been inspired to honour and consider sacred, pass without affecting men's souls?

The other day I read a newspaper report about some unfortunate governor-general who issued an edict expressing his praise and approval for two ‘fine young chaps’, as he called them, who had shot an unarmed prisoner as he leapt off a cart and tried to escape; he rewarded them with twenty-five roubles each. I did not believe this dreadful story of the governor’s behaviour and wrote to the editor of the newspaper asking him to confirm it. I was sent the original copy of the edict, and it was explained to me that this sort of praise for murder was an everyday thing and that the most high-ranking personages uttered these approbations.

Can these sort of words and deeds really disappear without trace? Thoughts and feeling so perverted and so audaciously expressed cannot but leave terrible traces of corruption, immorality and cruelty in the hearts of those who participate in them and read such orders. These deeds and injunctions must make people feel distrust and contempt for those who prescribe such terrible deeds, so offensive to the human conscience, and praise and reward them. So that if thousands are executed, how many tens of thousands, who have in one way or another taken part in these deeds, have been perverted by this participation and deprived of the last remnants of their religious and moral principles? Have they not been made ready, if not yet to hate, then to despise those who force them to perform these evil deeds, and to commit against them the very same deeds at the first opportunity?

The newspaper reports, printed daily and read by millions, on the number of people executed and sentenced to death, have an effect similar to news of changes in the weather – something that is bound to change continually, by the day. Even if those who read this sort of news every day do not ask themselves how to reconcile such deeds, committed under orders from the highest authorities with, let us say, not the Gospels, but the sixth commandment of Moses, at least the contradictions must evoke contempt in their hearts for the commandments, for religion in general, and for the authorities who perform deeds so evidently contrary to both the religious laws and conscience.

Surely it is apparent that evil deeds committed by the governing powers in order to rid themselves of their visible enemies gather twice or even ten times as many invisible enemies, who are far more angry.

One would think it were obvious to every thinking person that such behaviour from the government cannot improve the situation. It should be obvious not only to outsiders but to the rulers themselves. They must see the evident futility of what they are doing, and they must see the criminality of it. They must see this, for Christ's teaching of love for one's enemy, so carefully concealed by those who live according to violence, has penetrated the consciousness of the people of the Christian world, albeit not in the entirety of its complete and real meaning. I believe I am not mistaken in saying that this teaching has been particularly keenly

adopted by the simple Russian working people, whom the government are now so fiercely perverting.

Even if Marcus Aurelius could, despite his gentleness and wisdom, conduct wars and condemn people to death with a clear conscience, the people of today's Christian world can no longer do so without an inner awareness of their guilt. No matter what hypocritical and stupid Hague conferences and conditional punishments are invented, all these superficial absurdities not only fail to conceal their crimes, but on the contrary, point to the fact that these men already know themselves that what they are doing is wrong. However much they may assure themselves and others that various higher considerations dictate these dreadful violations of all human and divine laws, which are continually committed, they cannot hide, either from themselves or from decent people, the utter criminality, immorality and baseness of their conduct. For nowadays everyone knows that murder of whatever kind is vile, criminal and wrong; all the tsars, ministers and generals know this, however much they hide behind some invented superior considerations.

It is the same with revolutionaries of whatever party, if they permit murder for the attainment of their aims. No matter what they say about the fact that when power is in their hands they will have no use for the violent means they now employ, their crimes are just as immoral and cruel as the activities of the government. And they therefore lead to the same awful consequences as do the

evil-doings of the government: the animosity, bestialization and corruption of the people.

Their activity only differs in this (which is why it appears less criminal), that the futility of the activities of the government in power is apparent, while the activity of the revolutionaries – which is manifested for the most part in theory and only occasionally put into practice during revolutions, such as we have now in Russia – is not so evident.

The means and the method of struggle of both sides are equally alien to the human soul and to the tenets of the Christian teaching. Both embitter people, leading them to extreme levels of irrationality and brutality, while failing to attain the declared aim, and distancing others from any chance of attaining it.

The position and the activity of both warring parties – the government and the revolutionaries – here in Russia, as in the rest of the world, with their violent methods of improving human existence, is similar to that of people who, in order to warm themselves, break down the walls of the house they live in and chop it up for firewood.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 7

The Christian teaching in its true meaning, acknowledging the SUPREME LAW of human life to be the law of love which in no instance permits violence between men, is so close to the heart of man and gives such undoubted freedom, such independent happiness to both the individual and groups of people, as well as to the whole of humanity, that it would seem this need only be known for all men to accept it as the guiding principle of their behaviour. And, in spite of all the efforts of the Church to conceal this law, people have really come to understand this more and more and striven to realize it. But the unhappy fact is that at the time when the true meaning of the Christian teaching started becoming clearer to people, a large section of the Christian world has already become accustomed to regarding the truth as existing in external religious forms. And these forms not only hide the true meaning of the Christian teaching but uphold a system of government that is in direct opposition to it. Thus, in order to accept the Christian teaching in its true meaning, the people of the Christian world, who have, to a greater or lesser extent, understood the truth of Christianity, must free themselves not only from their belief in the false forms of a perverted Christian teaching, but also from belief in the necessity and inevitability of that system of government that was founded on this false Church religion.

Thus, although liberation from false religious forms is taking place ever more frequently, the people of our time, having rejected belief in dogmas, sacraments, miracles, the sanctity of the Bible and other institutions of the Church, are nevertheless unable to free themselves from those false teachings of the State, founded on a perverted Christianity and hiding the true one.

Some people, the majority of the working people, following tradition, fulfil the requirements of the Church and, partially believing in that teaching, they BELIEVE, without the least doubt they literally believe, in that system of government founded on violence that stems from the Church faith and which can under no circumstance be compatible with the Christian faith in its true meaning. Other people, the so-called educated ones, who on the whole have long ceased to believe in the Church and consequently in any kind of Christianity, believe as unconsciously as the simple folk in the system of government founded on violence, which was introduced and established by the very Church Christianity they have long ceased to believe in.

And so, those who, like the working populace, believe in the lawfulness of the existing structure of society, as too the so-called educated people who try, either gradually or by revolutionary processes, to change the existing order, believe equally in the necessity of violence as a chief weapon for structuring society. And neither one of them either acknowledges, or is capable of imagining, a social structure other than one based on violence.

It is just this unconscious faith or, rather, the superstition the people of the Christian world have in the lawfulness of upholding the structure of the world by violence, as well as in lawfulness and the necessity of violence in itself; it is just this faith founded on perverted Christianity and directly opposed to the truth (although people who have freed themselves from belief in pseudo-Christianity fail to recognize this), that has been, and is still today, the chief obstacle to man's acceptance of the Christian teaching in its real meaning – a meaning which is now becoming clearer and clearer.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 8

One need only recall Christ's teaching forbidding violent resistance to evil, and people, from the privileged gentry as compared to the labouring classes, will, whether they are believers or non-believers, simply smile ironically at such a reference, as if the idea that non-violent resistance to evil were possible is such blatant nonsense that serious-minded people would not even mention it.

The majority of such people, considering themselves moral and educated, will talk seriously and argue about the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the redemption, the sacraments and so forth; or about which of two political parties would have the best chance of success, or which political unions are the most desirable, whose proposals are sounder, those of the social democrats or those of the Socialist revolutionaries; but they are all quite agreed that belief in non-violent resistance to evil cannot be taken seriously.

Why is this?

Because people cannot but feel that recognition of the doctrine of non-resistance to evil tears at the roots of their established way of life, and demands of them something new and unknown that frightens them.

The outcome is that questions about the Trinity, the immaculate conception, the Eucharist and baptism may concern religious people, just as non-religious people may concern themselves with problems of political alliances, parties, Socialism and Communism, But the question of non-violent resistance to evil strikes them all as

some kind of astonishing nonsense, and the more absurd it is the greater the advantages they enjoy, under the existing structure of the world.

This is why the negation of the doctrine of non-resistance and the failure to comprehend it are always in proportion to the degree of power and wealth of civilized people.

People who occupy important positions of power, those who are very rich, used to their position, and who, like the majority of scholars, justify it, simply shrug their shoulders in response to any mention of non-resistance. People less important, less wealthy and less learned are less contemptuous. Still less contemptuous are men of even less importance, wealth and learning. And yet, all those whose life is directly funded on violence, though they might not be so scornful, will always adopt a negative attitude towards the idea that it is possible to apply to life the doctrine of non-violent resistance to evil.

Thus, if the solution to the question of liberating oneself from the perverted Christian teaching and the admissibility of violence that flows from it and which destroys love, and of accepting the Christian teaching in its true meaning, depended only on civilized men, who in our society enjoy a better position, in the material sense, than the majority of the working population – if this were so, the impending transition from a life based on violence to a life based on love would not be so close and inevitable as it is now, especially here in Russia where the vast majority of the nation,

more than two thirds of it, is not yet corrupted by wealth, power or civilization.

And since this majority has no reason, and no advantage to be gained from depriving itself of the blessings of a life of love by admitting the possibility of violence, it is therefore among these people (who are not perverted by wealth, power or civilization) that the change in the structure of life, which is now demanded by the clarification of the Christian teaching already achieved, must begin.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 17

But however much the blindness of those who believe in the necessity and inevitability of violence may strike me as strange, and however blatantly apparent the inevitability of non-resistance may be to me, it is not reasoned conclusions that convince me, or that can irrefutably convince other people, of the truth of non-resistance; it is only man's awareness of his spirituality, the basic expression of which is love, that can convince. It is love, true love, which comprises the essence of man's soul; that love which is revealed in Christ's teaching, and excludes even the suggestion of any kind of violence.

Whether the employment of violence or the endurance of evil will be useful or harmful I do not know, and no one knows. But I do know, as every person knows, that love is well-being; the love of others for me is a blessing and still more is my love for others. The supreme bliss is my love for others, and not only for those who love me, but as Christ said, for those who hate me, offend me, and commit evil against me. However strange these things may sound to someone who has not felt this, it is so, and when you think about it and experience it you are only surprised at how you could ever have failed to understand it. Love, true love, love that denies itself and transfers itself to another, is the awakening within oneself of the highest universal principle of life. But it is only true love and affords all the happiness it can give when it is simply love, free from anything personal, from the smallest drop of

personal bias towards its object. And such love can only be felt for one's enemy, for those who hate and offend. Thus, the injunction to love not those who love us, but those who hate us, is not an exaggeration, nor an indication of possible exclusions, but simply a directive for that opportunity and possibility of receiving the supreme bliss that love can give. That this must be so follows logically and one only needs to experience it to be convinced. And then instances of offence and assault become valuable and desirable. And thus, having penetrated the essence of the human soul, we see that it works in such a way that responding to evil with evil makes it suffer, whereas responding to evil with love leads to the highest attainable bliss.

Therefore, all non-violent resistance to evil brings well-being. And this well-being, by sublimating the personality, leads to the greatest bliss and also destroys the scarecrow which evokes resistance: the fear of death.

# EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. ‘There is nothing so good for a man as a liaison with a decent woman.’

2. The Crimean War of 1853–6, in which Russia was defeated by the combined forces of England, France, Turkey and Sardinia. It was during this period of his youth that Tolstoy first became aware of the horrors and futility of war.

3. On 23 September 1862 Leo Tolstoy married Sophie Andreyevna Behrs, who was then aged eighteen.

4. Tolstoy refers to the death of his favourite brother, Nikolai, who died of consumption on 20 September 1860, aged thirty-seven. The event had a profound effect on Tolstoy, who witnessed the moment of death and later used it as the subject for *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch* (1886).

5. Even as a young man Tolstoy was interested in pedagogical work and actively participated in the organization and running of peasant schools on his estate. During this period (the 1860s), much influenced by the ideas of the French Enlightenment, Tolstoy tried to run the schools à la Rousseau.

6. In 1861 the Tsar, Alexis II, issued a decree for the abolition of serfdom in Russia.

7. In the summer of 1878 Tolstoy went on a religious retreat to Southern Russia, and in 1879 on another to Kiev.

8. Koumiss is a fermented drink prepared from mare's milk and drunk by the Tartars.

9. One desyatin equals 2.7 acres.

10. Although not a literal quote, the ideas are in Plato's *Phaedo*, sections 62–9, which covers the trial, imprisonment and death of Socrates (*c*. 470–399 B.C.), and is thought to be representative of Socrates' thought. See note 52 below.

11. The thought of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), perhaps the most important German Romantic philosopher, greatly interested Tolstoy. These pessimistic ideas on the nature of Will as the inscrutable and evil power behind the world are presented in *Parerga and Paralipomena*.

12. These passages are taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes, which dates from the third century B.C. and was thus not actually written by Solomon, who died *c* 930 B.C.

13. René Descartes (1596–1650), French philosopher and mathematician. Often referred to as the founder of modern philosophy, he made successive attacks on the problem of certainty, striving to establish a new method of philosophical investigation which starts from the premise of absolute doubt before the certainty of anything can be established.

14. The Ectene is a part of the Orthodox service consisting of versicles and responses.

15. The Russians use the same word, ‘Vosskresenie’, for both Sunday and Resurrection.

16. The rules of prayer are directions for prayer found in the manuals used by both clergy and laity in the Orthodox religion.

17. The Martyrology and Prologues contain stories and legends of the saints and martyrs of the Orthodox Church.

18. Macarius the Great, commonly known as Macarius the Egyptian, was a fourth-century hermit and desert father.

19. St John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (*c*. 344–407), sometimes known of as ‘John of the Golden Mouth’, is one of the best loved and most venerated of the Church Fathers in the Orthodox Church; his works are widely read.

20. In the 1660s the Russian Church was divided by a schism instigated by the Patriarch Nikon, who introduced into Russian religious practices certain reforms bringing them closer in line with those of Greek Orthodoxy (for example, the manner of making the sign of the cross, pronouncing the Credo, painting icons, etc.). This tampering with religious rites not unsurprisingly led to dissent. Russian religious dissenters can be divided in two basic groups: the Old Believers, or Raskolniks, and the sectarians. The former repudiated the ritualistic reforms forced through by Nikon, while remaining faithful to Orthodoxy in other respects, while the latter sought not so much to defend the old ways as to establish new answers to religious questions.

21. See previous note.

22. The Molokans, or ‘milk drinkers’, were a moderate sect that had broken with the Church and were identifiable by their practice of drinking milk and its products on fast days, rejecting the sacraments and rituals, and their belief in the Bible as the sole basis for their practices and beliefs.

23. The Shakers were a millennarian sect that originated in England in 1747. They aimed at living a celibate, ascetic, communal life.

24. Open controversy began in the twelfth century between the Greek and the Roman churches over the words about the Holy Spirit in the Nicene Creed. Originally the Creed ran: ‘I believe… in the Holy Spirit. Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son…’ This version is still used by the Orthodox today, while in the West, the Roman church inserted an extra phrase: ‘who proceeds from the Father and the Son (filoque)…’

25. Tsar Alexis Mikhailovitch (1629–76), second in the Romanov dynasty and father of Peter the Great.

26. The Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8.

27. Tolstoy is referring to *An Examination of Dogmatic Theology*, which he wrote in 1882 but never published.

28. Marcelin Berthelot (1827–1907), a French savant celebrated for his work in organic chemistry, is also interesting on account of his wide philosophical outlook and his view of philosophical

systems as the expression of the contemporary state of scientific knowledge.

29. Lec de Clapirs Vauvenargues (1715–47). French moralist whose writings are marked by a stoical morality, probably derived from his youthful readings of Plutarch and Seneca and by a rare sympathy for, and faith in, human nature.

30. Friedrich Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834). German philosopher and theologian who, rather than defining religion in terms of reason or morality, sees it as a feeling of the absolute dependence of oneself as a finite being on the infinite. The infinite whole, taken as a set of things, is God, and the individual is believed to gain his identity, or life-unity, by developing an awareness of his particular place in nature and history. Tolstoy's definition of religion as the establishment of a relationship with the infinite bears considerable affinity to Schleiermacher's concept.

31. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72). Bavarian philosopher and theologian who was influenced by Hegel and himself influenced Marx and Engels. He defined religion as 'the dream of the human mind', and viewed all spiritual development as properly relating to man, rather than to God. He advocated this as a conscious activity conducive to the well-being of the human species.

32. Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). French Protestant scholar and critic who questioned the reliability of much that passed for historical knowledge, and emphasized the irreducible nature of

many philosophical and theological dilemmas and the limitations of reason.

33. Benjamin Constant de Rebecque (1767–1830). French novelist, political writer and politician renowned for his relationship with Madame de Staël and for his novel *Adolphe*, based on this relationship.

34. Count Eugène Goblet D'Alviella (1846–1925), Belgian publicist and statesman. He was deeply interested in the history of religion and known for his *L'évolution réligieuse contemporaine chez les Anglais, les Americaines et les Hindous*, trans. English.

35. Albert Reville (1826–1906). French pastor and savant who published a number of works on the history of religion.

36. Auguste Comte (1798–1857), French philosopher and a principle founder of the school of Positivist philosophy. Comte traced the development of human thought and society from its theological and metaphysical stages to its positive stage, which he saw characterized by systematic collection and correlation of observed facts and the abandonment of unverifiable speculation about first causes and final ends. He and his followers held a strong belief in science and scientific method, which they held could reform not only philosophy but human society.

37. The three Gods of the Hindu trinity (trimurti), representing the three aspects of the Supreme Being: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer.

38. Attila (d. A.D. 453), King of the Huns, known to his contemporaries as 'the scourge of God', who swept through the Eastern Empire into Gaul and Italy until he was checked by a joint army of Romans and Visigoths.

39. Genghis Khan (1167(?)-1227), Mongol conqueror, who as leader of the notoriously savage Mongol armies created a vast Asian Empire.

40. Nero (A.D. 37–68), Roman Emperor (*reg.* 54–68) whose frivolity brought the line of Julio-Claudian emperors to an end. Known for his cruelty, he procured the murder of both his mother and his wife. Finally, deserted by all, he committed suicide.

41. See note 11 above.

42. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), German philosopher, historian and mathematician, best known in the history of philosophy as the author of monadology and the theory of the pre-established harmony. His highly original thought has been referred to as the dawning of the modern world.

43. Indra is the beneficent storm and fertility God of the Vedic religion. He wields a thunderbolt, brings rain, overcomes his enemies and shares the booty with his friends.

44. Trimurti is the Hindu trinity, consisting of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

45. Mo Tzu or Mo Ti (491–381 B.C.), Chinese philosopher and the next major philosopher after Confucius. The two main ideas of his school of philosophy were: (1) the leader principle, i.e. each

individual identifying with the leader of his group and the leader with a higher world until the ‘son of heaven’ is reached: and (2) the principle of universal love as man’s chief need, be he ruler or ruled.

46. Vasilii Kirillovitch Sytaev (1819–92) was a self-educated peasant and religious thinker living in the Tver region. During the important years of 1881–2 when Tolstoy was forming his religious ideas, Sytaev befriended him.

47. Tolstoy wrote *Religion and Morality* in 1893 in reply to certain questions put to him by a German ethical cultural society.

48. The Encyclopaedists were a group of eighteenth century French writers known as ‘les philosophes’ who, motivated by the view that social evils could be eliminated through the spread of knowledge, collaborated under the editorship of Diderot and D’Alembert in the compilation of the *Encyclopaedie* (1751–65). This work is characterized by its sceptical attitude to religion and the advancement of liberal and tolerant social and political views.

49. The Deists refers collectively and rather loosely to a group of seventeenth and eighteenth-century religious thinkers in England and France who, in attempting to justify religion, developed what in their time were regarded as extreme views: assaults upon traditional supernaturalism, external revelation, and dogmas implying mysteries, and concluding that reason is the touchstone to religious validity, that religion and ethics are natural phenomena and that the traditional God need hardly be appealed

to since man finds in nature the necessary guides for moral and religious living. Tolstoy here refers to the French Deists, among whom Voltaire was the leading figure.

50. Jacques Henri Bernadin de Saint Pierre (1737–92), French writer and disciple of Rousseau. He belonged to the school of French Deists and is known for his twin theories of the superiority of sentiment over reason and the virtues of Arcadia.

51. See note 36 above.

52. Democritus (460–370 B.C.). Greek philosopher and prolific expositor of the philosophy of Atomism, he was also a rigorous naturalist and developed a code of ethics based on a hedonistic value theory. As a thorough-going materialist he saw no purpose in the universe and disbelieved in popular religion.

53. Socrates (*c* . 470–399 B.C.). Greek philosopher who wrote no philosophical treatises himself, but the early dialogues of Plato, his pupil, are believed to be representative of his thought, i.e. *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*. Aristotle credited Socrates with contributing 'inductive argument and universal definitions' to philosophy, and he is well known for his concern with ethical matters. Tolstoy frequently mentions or quotes from him in his later writings.

54. See note 13 above.

55. Isaac Newton (1642–1727). British mathematician and physicist who formulated Galilean mechanics, discovered the inverse square law and universal gravitation and made notable contributions to the theory of light. Newton's discoveries had a

profound effect on late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy.

56. See note 35 for Auguste Comte as one of the chief founders of the Positivist movement of thought.

57. The Pythagoreans were the followers of Pythagoras, who died at the end of the sixth century B.C. Pythagoras both founded a religious sect and was possibly the most important forefather of modern natural science. In the former capacity he taught a mystical doctrine including the transmigration of souls and the consequent kinship of all living things, ritual purity, initiation ceremonies, vegetarianism, equality of women, communal living and the prohibition of eating beans.

58. The Therapeutae were a sect of Jewish mystics residing in Egypt in the first century A.D.

59. The Essenes were an ancient Jewish sect, remarkable for ascetic practices and a coenobitical life.

60. The Unitarians. Believers in the religious doctrine that God is one and that Jesus is to be regarded as human and not as a supernatural being.

61. The Universalists. Believers in the doctrine of universal salvation or redemption. The movement began at the end of the eighteenth-century.

62. The Quakers. Members of a religious society founded by George Fox in 1648–50, characterized by peaceful principles and simple dress and manners.

63. Serbian Nazarenes. There would appear to be no encyclopedic reference to this sect, but it seems probable that they were a later offshoot of a fourth-century sect, originating in Syria, called the Nazarenes. The Nazarenes were an obscure Jewish-Christian sect who continued to observe the Law of Moses after the mother Church of Jerusalem had abandoned it.

64. The Doukabars, or 'Fighters for the Spirit'. Members of a Russian religious sect that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. They taught that all human souls are created before corporal bodies, that Christ enters the souls of living people, that all rituals and institutions are the products of original sin. Aided by Leo Tolstoy, they emigrated early in the twentieth century to Canada, where they became renowned for acts of civil disobedience.

65. See note 36 above.

66. Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), German philosopher who sought to overcome irrationalism by postulating the Unconscious, as containing both Will and Idea. Influenced by Schopenhauer and Hegel.

67. Epictetus (A.D. 60–138), Greek philosopher and one of the best known Stoic philosophers. Much read by Tolstoy.

68. Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121–180), Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher. In his main writing, *The Meditations*, he interprets stoicism as a guide to responsible living, with the main goal in life being tranquillity of mind achieved by living in conformity with

nature and opposing bodily passions when they run counter to reason. Much read by Tolstoy.

69. Lucius Anneus Seneca (A.D. 3–65), Roman philosopher and chief Stoic figure of the Imperial period. His message was the Stoic preachment mixed with overtones that have a similarity to Christian morality, e.g. the practice of universal love and brotherhood.

70. Philosophical pessimism, expressed in the idea that hope is unreasonable and happiness unobtainable, was prevalent in the nineteenth century and is well represented in the writings of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

71. See note 57 above.

72. See notes 67–9 above.

73. Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), English biologist and philosopher and an effective exponent of Darwinian evolution.

74. Each chapter of *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* is prefaced with quotations taken from a wide range of literary sources. Those where the author is not indicated are taken from Tolstoy's own writings, and all of them are taken from one of two collections of such quotations made by Tolstoy at the end of his life – *The Thoughts of Wise Men for Every Day*, which he made in diary form during an illness in 1902, and *Daily Reading*, which he compiled during 1904–9. Tolstoy himself, in a preface to a collection, apologized for lack of bibliographical reference, and they should be viewed as incidental anthologies rather than

scholarly works. The same problem of reference arises in this translation, and is made more difficult by the obscurity of some of the authors, who were no doubt less obscure at the turn of the century. Where possible a short bibliographical reference is given, while unlimited scholarship is required to trace the text sources.

75. Blaise Pascal (1623–62). French philosopher, mathematician and scientist who spent the latter part of his life absorbed in the study of man and his spiritual problems, discovering faith to be a sounder guide than reason. He is celebrated for his *Pensées*, which had a strong influence on Tolstoy at the end of the 1870s, when he was preparing his own *Confession*.

76. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–1799), an influential German satirist who, while inclining towards theoretical materialism, yet had a strong religious element.

77. Henri Frederic Amiel (1821–72), Swiss prose writer and religious philosopher of a rather macabre bent.

78. See note 75 above.

79. Lucie Mallory (1886–1918?), an American writer who published a spiritualist journal, *The World's Advanced Thought*, in Portland, U.S.A.

80. John Morrison Davidson (1857–1909), prolific lyricist, playwright and philosopher. He expounded an original philosophy both materialist and aristocratic, finding the cosmic process as interpreted by evolution a useful source of inspiration.

81. Hubert Anson Newton (1830–96). Tolstoy is presumably referring to the American mathematician, best known for his research work on comets and meteors.

82. Wilhelm Solter (1846–1924), a German historian who specialized in the history of antiquity.

83. Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72), an Italian patriot, political thinker and critic who was extremely influential in the struggle for Italian independence. He founded the revolutionary party 'Giovine Italia' (Young Italy).

84. Tatian (late 2nd century A.D.). Christian apologist and the most severe critic of Greek science and philosophy.

85. Clement of Alexandria (*c* . A.D. 150–215). Christian theologian who, seeing the aim of Christianity to be a nobler, holier life, attempted to raise the attitude of faith to the level of knowledge.

86. Origen (*c*. 185–254). Christian theologian and neo-platonist who attempted to reconcile Christian philosophy with Greek philosophy.

87. Tertullian (*c*. A.D.155–222). The most vigorous and uncompromising of the early Christian apologists and the first to use the trinitarian formula.

88. Cyprian (*c* . A.D.200–258). Bishop of Carthage, first great teacher of ecclesi-ology and the first African martyred for his faith.

89. Lactancius (4th century A.D.). Christian apologist who argued strongly against the value of philosophy and stressed the

importance of revelation.

90. Henry George (1839–97). American author and political economist, known for his part in the struggle for achieving equal rights of man and for the new form he gave to this doctrine by showing how it could be enforced on an economic level.

91. Etienne de la Boëtie (1530–63). French political writer and translator remembered for his *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, a work of passionate protest against the tyranny of princes.

92. Charles Letourneau (1831–1902). French anthropologist who published a series of works on ethnology. He believed that all sociology was founded on ethnology.

93. Anatole France (1844–1924). French man of letters, characterized by his philosophical and religious scepticism and anti-clerialism, and his political ideology which came to the fore with his participation in the Dreyfus affair, bringing about his conversion to socialism.

94. William Emery Channing (1780–1842). American prose writer and literary and social critic.

95. See note 90.

96. See note 82.

97. See note 85.

98. See note 86.

99. See note 87.

100. See note 88.

101. See note 89.

102. Julian the Apostate (*reg.* A.D. 361–3). Roman Emperor remembered for his administrative reforms and for his openly revealed pagan beliefs and indirect persecution of Christians.

103. Constantine the Great (*reg* A.D.306–37), the first Christian Emperor of Rome. His foundation of Constantinople as the 'New Rome' in 330 made this city the second in the empire. In 313 he suspended the persecution of Christians and extended toleration to all recognized religions. He was extremely active in ecclesiastical affairs, notably in promoting the Council of Nicaea in 325.

104. The Manicheans were followers of a religious movement named after its Persian founder, Mani (A.D.216–76). Their beliefs were radically dualistic, seeing human life and the world as a struggle between the totally independent principles of good and evil. They practised rigorous asceticism, striving for freedom from the darker, material elements in human nature.

105. The Montanists were followers of a religious movement that originated with its founder, Montanus, in the second century A.D., rivalling Christianity. Its members practised strict morality and followed ascetic practices, stressing the importance of martyrdom.

106. The Cathars were members of a movement that was strong in the South of France and Northern Italy during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, having spread from Bulgaria (known as the Bogomil movement) via the Crusades, which in turn derived from

the fifth-century Paulician movement in Asia Minor. Members practised the cult of poverty and considered the Old Testament Jehovah a wicked demiurge.

107. See note 21.

108. The Klisti were members of a sect that originated in the black earth region of Russia (the fertile soil of the Ukraine) in the late seventeenth century. Their central idea was that Christ reincarnates himself by entering living individuals who thereby become ‘Christs’, and upon their death the spirit passes to others. They held meetings to the accompaniment of singing and dancing, which often degenerated into mass hysterics, and were known to engage in sexual orgies.

109. The Skoptsi were members of a late eighteenth-century religious sect that was an offshoot of the Klisti (see previous note). They maintained that woman with her beauty is the main obstacle to salvation, and in order to resist her they castrated themselves.

110. See note 20.

111. See note 64.

112. See note 67.

113. Alexandre Dumas (fils) (1824–95). The natural son of Alexandre Dumas the novelist, he was an impassioned moralizer, his plays often reflecting his obsession with problems of illegitimacy, adultery and sexual morality.

114. Vladimir Chertkov (1853–1936). Tolstoy’s close friend and follower, he was also the executor of his will.

115. Alexander Herzen, (1812–70). Russian author and revolutionary, exiled to Siberia for his subversive ideas, after which he went into voluntary exile, finally settling in London where he published his radical periodical *The Bell* (*Kolokot*) denouncing the abuses of the Russian government.

116. See note 75.

117. See note 75.